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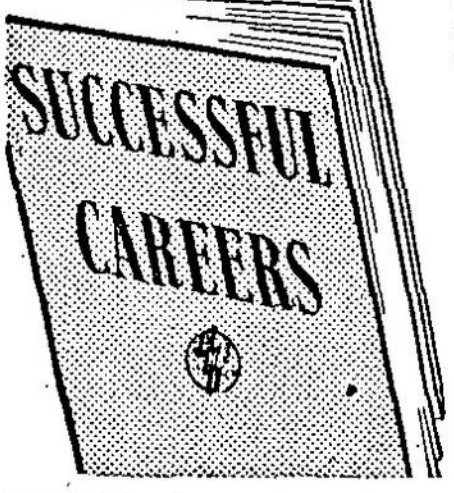

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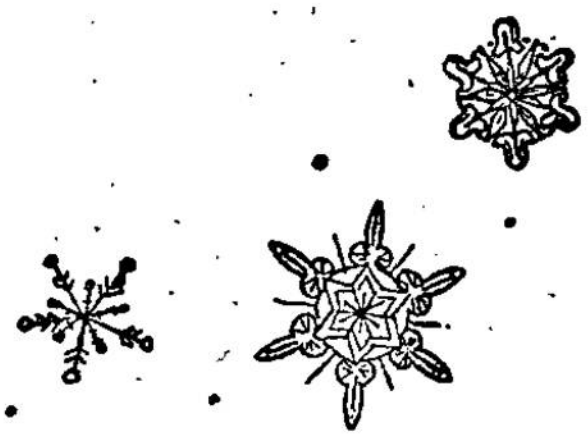
Frost and Fire

FROST has set crystal flowers
Shining in fields where ploughs
Have lately delved so deep ;
It falls in silver showers
As I wake the leaning boughs
From their long languorous sleep.

The sun lifts its great flushed face
Over the hill and throws
A cord of light across the climbing spire,
And through the blue unfolding space
A bird like a dark arrow goes
Feathered with frost and fire.

DOUGLAS GIBSON



GIFT HORSE

"It's the devil's right-hand man come to call on you," announced Marthe

by

LOUIS ARTHUR CUNNINGHAM

IN all the Laurentian Mountains, in that glorious ski-country which every year attracts thousands of sportsmen with their thousands of dollars, there is no greater name among the innkeepers than that of Aldéric Madore, proprietor of L'Auberge Madore, the big hotel at St. Médard, and there is no shrewder bargainer than the same Monsieur Madore.

He was one of the few who survived the snowless winter—you recall the one—when the hills showed brown the whole season through; when the bit of snow that did fall melted in the near-summer sunshine; when innkeeper after innkeeper put up his shutters and went to Mo'real to work.

Aldéric Madore weathered that unnatural winter and with his dogged Norman stubbornness prepared for the next. But something, he decided, must be done about the weather. The International Ski Meet was scheduled for St. Médard early in January and there had to be snow—there just had to be! Sound as was his bank balance, Aldéric knew that another snowless winter would be his ruin.

So, being a good atheist, he decided early in the autumn to enlist God on his side.

France, which has given the world some of the greatest saints, has also produced some of the finest agnostics, atheists and free-thinkers. Aldéric was a confirmed heathen, but he was also a peasant—and a Norman peasant to boot—and he did not underrate the powers of *le bon Dieu* or of the men who served Him.

His heart was glad when, late in the month of December, l'Abbé Paul Laflamme came to St. Médard to succeed Monseigneur Ducharme who, in his ninetieth year, had retired to La Providence St. Joseph in Quebec, to await the last kind summons of the Master he had served so long and so well.

L'Abbé Laflamme was just the man whom Aldéric, if he had ever prayed, would have prayed for. They had been boys together, class-mates at the school in St. Roch, their native village. Their

families had lived on adjoining farms and for generations had derived the richest savour of life out of trying to swindle each other—over a cow, an *arpent* of ground, a load of hay, a horse, anything.

Père Laflamme had been in St. Médard only a few weeks when Aldéric, taking time off from preparing his big hotel for the winter season, called to see him.

Marthe Leblanc, the old housekeeper—as much part of the presbytery as the leather chairs, the prie-dieux and the statue of good St. Médard—left him in the hall and knocked on the curé's door. When his mild voice called, "*Oui, entrez, s'il vous plaît,*" she closed the door firmly behind her, and stood before him with her hands thrust into her apron pockets—a little old faggot of a woman with a nutcracker chin.

"It is the devil's right-hand man come to call on you, Monsieur le curé."

"Bid him enter—eh!" Père Laflamme had been reading Lacordaire and hadn't quite come back to earth. "*Quoi donc!* What is this—the devil's—?"

"Monsieur Aldéric Madore, owner of the big hotel in the village, who has often said that all the churches should be burned down."

"*Bien!*" Père Laflamme was thin and had the face of a saint and great black glowing eyes which could have frightened one if their owner had cared to—but he never did. "By all means bring him in and fetch some *vin rouge* and some *galettes*—a taste of good wine, a few cakes such as you make, Marthe, may work his conversion, along with a few hints from myself. Show him in."

Marthe sniffed.

"Don't let him talk you out of the silver, and perhaps it would be as well to have the poor-boxes emptied. You do not know that one."

"But I do," smiled the curé. "We grew up together. He once tricked me into exchanging my bicycle for a useless pony."

"He wouldn't even give you the pony now," muttered Marthe, but she went off and presently returned shepherding the great Aldéric himself.

With outstretched hands the curé met him—a big hulk of a man, swarthy, bottle-nosed, thin-jawed, with little shoe-button eyes. He wore a fine coon-coat and a red scarf, and had a big diamond on his thick little finger.

"*Bienvenu*, Aldéric!" The curé's mystic eyes took him all in. "Welcome, old friend! Have you come to trade back my bicycle? Because if you have, I fear I have no dud ponies—"

"Ha! Ha!" Aldéric had a great, hearty laugh. "Nothing

like that, *Monsieur l'Abbé*, but I have come,"—he sat down in the big chair the curé indicated—" to ask your help— "

" Good ! " The curé sat in his own big chair and passed cigars, and while they were lighting these and inquiring about each other's health, Marthe brought the decanter of port and the little round biscuits on a silver tray which she set down on a tabouret between them, looking with eyes of sharp and dire warning at the curé.

" Now, Aldéric," said the curé, after they had tasted the wine, " what is it I can do for you ? "

" Snow," said Aldéric.

" Sn— ," Père Laflamme choked on his wine. " Did I understand you to say snow ? "

" Yes, snow," nodded Aldéric seriously.

" But I do not understand—"

" *Ecoutez*," said Aldéric patiently. " I have read in the newspapers of what you accomplished when you were curé at St. Benoît —how, when the fields were parched, the wells gone dry, the crops all but ruined and the cattle mad with thirst, you prayed to your God and—there was a cloudburst."

Père Laflamme bent his head. His face, when he raised it again, was very serious.

" That is God's work, Aldéric," he said. " Not mine. I am but the humble intercessor—"

" You've got influence," said Aldéric with peasant stubbornness. " Now I don't pretend to understand these things—moreover I don't believe in them, but I do know that more than once you made it rain. Now I want you to make it snow—I'll pay for it, gladly."

The curé shook his head. Had it been anyone but a real rock-bound peasant, superstitious, primitive ; and had it, moreover, been any peasant other than Aldéric Madore, the curé would have thought him quite insane. But, peasant-born himself, and knowing the family of Madore by bitter experience, he understood what was in the big man's mind. Aldéric wore a rich coat, fine clothes and jewels, but you could still see the smock-frock, the old peaked cap and straw-stuffed wooden sabots that his grandfather, old Phileas Madore, had worn all his life.

" Of course," said the curé at length, " I'll be glad to ask *le bon Dieu* to send the snow, Aldéric. I know how last winter, when no snow came, our villages were filled with hunger, misery, despair."

" It was a terrible thing," said Aldéric, " a thing unheard of in these mountains where we used to have better snow than the Bernese Oberland ever saw. We dare not have another winter like last, *mon père*, but here we are, only a few days from the big International Ski Meet, every hotel booked solid, and not enough

snow covering the slopes to let a child go coasting on his little sled. You must help us."

" As I have just told you—"

Aldéric's little eyes glittered. He looked very sly, as who should say, " Come off it, my friend. None of that! I know you can do something about it—"

The curé loved his Master and now gave thought to his stewardship. Aldéric was a rich man, a hard bargainer—well, God expected his stewards to be hard bargainers too.

" You said something about—a *quid pro quo*, Aldéric."

" Nothing of the kind," said Aldéric with instant suspicion.

" But you said you'd pay for the snow! ".

" Oh, of course I did, but none of that other *quid*—whatever it is. I'll pay for the snow all right. What would you—what would *le bon Dieu* ask for a first-class snowstorm between now and tomorrow night? "

The curé had been measuring his man; now he took the plunge.

" We need a new altar—a white altar—the good Monseigneur Ducharme had set his heart on it but was never able to afford it. I promised him I would do my best. If he could see a new altar—"

" A white altar—," Aldéric's big hand covered his mouth as he stroked his jaw with his fingers. " Consider it done, *mon père.* You shall have the most beautiful snow-white altar ever seen in St. Médard."

" Good. And all I have to do is cover the hills with a mantle of white, *hein*? "

" A bargain. It's a bargain." Aldéric drained his glass. " You are a shrewd bargainer, old friend. I knew you would get your own back after I traded you that little pony, Pégase, for your bicycle. By the way, did you know the chain used to fall off that bicycle all the time and could never be rightly fixed? "

" *Vraiment?* " The curé looked pained. " I could not have known—any more than you knew Pégase was no good. Ah, well, we are men now."

" Men who still know how to drive a bargain," nodded Aldéric preparing to go. " This is a good one we have made today."

" If I can only fulfil my part," mused the good abbé, watching Aldéric climb into his big English car and wave a fur-gloved hand as he was driven off by Antoine Guay, the hotel porter. " How glad that old priest, Père Ducharme, would be to see a magnificent white marble altar in our church. Let Aldéric give that, *et super nivem dealbabitur*—and he shall be made whiter than snow—"

At benediction that night Père Laflamme said a special prayer

for snow, a sincere prayer, which the congregation repeated with heartfelt earnestness. He asked God, he asked Our Lady of the Snows—he asked St. Médard and St. Wenceslaus for good measure —to send a real old-time snow-fall.

It began at midnight, and it was something to behold. It was a snow of snows, covering every brown spot on the slopes of the mountains, making thick white icing on cottage roofs and white caps on the fir trees, transforming St. Médard village into a picture of beauty fit to ravish the rich Americans and pry their fine dollars out of their pockets.

The curé, up before dawn to say Mass, looked out on the white world and found it more beautiful than ever before. He ordered Simon Perrier, the bell-ringer, to ring out a peal; he thanked God humbly, and Our Lady and St. Médard and St. Wenceslaus. And he thought of the white altar, wondering when Aldéric would start building it, whether it would be of Parian or Carrara marble . . .

The curé had to go to Quebec that morning and would not return until the following noon. He went with a light heart. He would see old Monseigneur Ducharme there and tell him about the wonderful stroke of fortune that was to bring the long prayed-for altar to St. Médard.

He made his way to the bus terminal through throngs of skiers, crowding the village streets in their gay costumes of red and blue and a hundred other colours. Their clear laughter hung in the frosty air. They made bird-swift movements across the slopes and under the great tower of the jump where in a few days the cream of world performers would display their skill. L'Auberge Madore was bulging at the joists; the yard was jammed with buses and expensive American cars and bright red sleighs with little white horses and silver bells and bear-skin coated *cochers*. Aldéric kept these for atmosphere, and because he owned lots of hay-land.

Ah, it was a happy scene. It was wonderful what a little snow could do, mused the curé, and he thought of his lovely new altar—high-spired, inlaid with gold, dazzlingly white and beautiful.

It was there when he returned from Quebec next day at noon—high-spired, inlaid with shimmering crystals, dazzlingly white and beautiful—and made of snow!

It stood in the little yard between the church and the presbytery, right up against the curé's study window. It was a thing of infinite beauty made by the master wood-carvers of St. Médard, who, in winter, amused the tourists with their snow-sculptures. It was a dream, a veritable little Taj Mahal, only dedicated to a higher power. It hurt the eyes the way the ice crystals danced and shimmered and sent off a thousand lights.

"*Bon Dieu!*" Père Laflamme bent his head. "How beautiful

it is, and I know God will smile on it, but—but—that Madore—that swindling, cheating—a man who would try to outsmart even his Maker on a bargain. I see it now. He promised a snow-white altar; at no time did he mention marble, nor did I; nor was it stated that the altar should be in church. *Ciel!* The pony was a venial sin compared to this swindle."

He went into the presbytery, dreading to face old Marthe. Had she not snorted at his talk of the lovely new marble altar?

But Marthe was kind. She saw his stricken face and was glad she had made him her best *soupe aux pois* and some of the *poulin râpé* he was so fond of.

All she said was, "The sheep is ever an easy prey for the wolf, but sometimes the wolf gets indigestion."

The curé really hoped it would be so in this case. He couldn't help himself. Here, to fulfil His part of the bargain *le bon Dieu* had sent a first-class snowstorm, a *de luxe* snowstorm. And what had that scoundrel Madore done for his part? Hired wood-carvers to fashion an altar of snow—beautiful to be sure—but a thing of a day.

Then, to add insult to injury, the altar darkened the good curé's study so much that he had to turn on the lights in order to read his breviary.

Gloomy thoughts came to him, blotting out the fine print of the Holy Office. I should ask God to send a thaw, he told himself—do something to confound this scheming Madore.

But charity and his natural kindness of heart forbade his doing anything of the sort. Nor did he need to. On the very next day, the eve of the big meet, St. Médard was visited with the strangest phenomenon ever witnessed in the Laurentian Mountains. To this day it is a marvel. No one is able to explain it in any satisfactory way; even the meteorological experts have given it up.

It wasn't a thaw—the weather was bitterly cold; it wasn't *la brume*, the white fog of the valley; it wasn't hail or sleet. The snow became stone-hard, granular, rough as sandpaper. You couldn't ski on it. The runners stuck as if they were trying to slide on crushed rock. That was it—it was like rock.

Everything was at a standstill, the slopes deserted, the bars and the inn-parlour crowded with puzzled and disgruntled skiers. A babel of tongues, Norse, Gallic, Erse, Saxon, filled the air; but one phrase hit the ear of Aldéric Madore with the impact of a sledge-hammer—"*dure comme le marbre*—hard as marble!"

Hard as marble chips, that snow—hard and unyielding as finest Parian or good Carrara marble—the stuff of which altars are made.

"*Sapristi!*" muttered Aldéric. "I might have known there was no fair-dealing in a Laflamme—that priest has swindled me."

So, at noon, when already some of the guests were talking about

leaving, Aldéric summoned his fine Bentley, shrugged into his coon-coat, and was driven off to the presbytery, his shrewd brain working at fever-pitch, his big fingers tapping the rich upholstery of the car, as it crunched over the chipped marble of the road.

The sky was grey but there was no sign of snow. The weather reports said clear and cold, and here was the great army of skiers immobilized, hung up, helpless; and here were the fortunes of Aldéric and all the other good *aubergistes* of Ste. Agathe, Mont Tremblant, St. Médard and the rest, hanging in the balance.

Marthe Leblanc was leaving the presbytery as Aldéric entered. She gave him a witch's look.

"You will find *Monsieur le curé* in his study, sitting in the dark made by your splendid gift that stands outside his window."

Aldéric watched her go down the village street, then marched in and knocked on the curé's door. When he was bidden to enter, he squared his shoulders, put on his best smile and bustled in. It was so dark he almost tripped over a hassock, but Père Laflamme did not switch on the lights. Aldéric could just see his pale thin face, the great glowing eyes.

"Ah, Aldéric," said the curé, "so you have come, *hein*?"

Aldéric found a chair, the one he had sat in previously. He took a deep breath and blurted out.

"Well, *Monsieur le curé*, how did you like the model of the fine marble altar I am donating to your church?"

"Eh?" The curé sat up quickly, then subsided. He wanted to laugh, but he was still too much perturbed. "So that snow altar was just the model of the real one, *hein*?"

"But of course, *mon père*!" Aldéric laughed his great laugh. "It was but the plan, the—the symbol. The real one will be installed at once—as soon as the real snow comes—"

The curé made a strangled sound and went to answer the door-bell. It was some minutes before he returned, walking slowly and bearing the decanter of port and some *petits fours*.

He poured the wine, set the glasses on the tabouret between them. "So we must have what the Americans call 'a new deal'—is that it, Aldéric?"

"Well—," Aldéric squirmed a bit in his big chair. "As you know, in the first talk, I promised a white altar—no mention of what material or where it was to be. I fulfilled my part of the bargain."

"True," nodded the curé. "And I, for my part, promised to cover the hills with a mantle of white—no specifications as to whether it would be snow or—marble chips."

Aldéric nodded.

"Now," he said, "we will get down to the tacks of brass. I want a new snowstorm of first-grade snow for ski-ing. It must

come this very day and it must be the genuine article. In return I will have installed, at no matter what cost under twenty-five thousand dollars, an altar of the finest marble, in the church of St. Médard. There ! "

The curé nodded, " So far, so good. But it is not enough."

" Not enough ? " Aldéric jerked erect. " You mean your boss—*le bon Dieu* asks more than that—what more ? "

" You must come to worship at the altar—you must return to the God of your fathers. Do this—and the snow is yours."

" It is sure ? "

" It is most certain."

Aldéric bent his head. The words came slowly, learned when he was a little altar-boy in red cassock, side by side with Paul Laflamme in the parish church of St. Roch, *Introibo ad altare Dei ; ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam*—I will go in unto the altar of God—to God who giveth joy to my youth— "

The curé bowed his head and he prayed deeply and thanked God and asked for forgiveness.

Aldéric sat for almost half an hour discussing the altar and the snowstorm-to-be. He sat until there came a knock at the door. It opened when the curé said, " *Entrez, s'il vous plaît,*" and there was old Marthe—her bonnet, her shawl, covered with glistening snow of the finest texture.

" That—" Aldéric almost ran to her— " is that snow ? "

" Well, old fool, it is too soft to be flour and not sweet enough to be icing-sugar ! It has been snowing this last half-hour and all your Americans are out on the hill starting in again to break their necks."

Aldéric's little eyes sought those of l'Abbé Paul Laflamme, deepset and glowing.

" It had started to snow when you answered the door-bell that time, *Monsieur le curé,*" he said. " You had a sure thing."

The curé nodded.

" So it had and so I did—and if you hadn't built your snow altar up against my window you would have seen it too."

Aldéric shrugged.

" *Bien !* It is done. It is a bargain. Tell me, *Monsieur le curé*—did you know that the chain on that bicycle was never any good and would always come off ? "

The curé's thick brows went up.

" No more than you knew about the pony, my friend."

* * *

DEFINITION

Oboe : an ill wood-wind that nobody blows good.

FANGS OF THE CAT

"You have the dog, and the gun, and your blood," his father had said

by STUART CLOETE

"I AM old enough," the boy said.

"He is old enough," his father said from the bed.

"He's only twelve," the woman said.

"And I'm not afraid," the boy said.

"That's it," his mother said, putting her hand on his shoulder. "It makes me afraid that you are not afraid. That you are afraid of nothing."

"It's his blood," his father said. "He has bold blood from both sides."

"*Ja*, Jan!" the woman said. "And look where our boldness has got us. Because of it you are crippled."

"I shall get well," the man said. "The doctor has promised it. Besides how could I refuse to ride the horse? If there had been no rain he would not have slipped and fallen on me."

"I have Moskou," the boy said, pointing to the big half-bred hound. A bastard, the Boers called him, half foxhound and half collie. "And I have the gun."

"He's young to leave alone on the farm," the woman said again. She looked round the kitchen, at the door of the great oven where she baked bread, where her mother had baked bread before her; at the wood-burning stove, at the clay floors so carefully smeared each day with the cow dung from the bucket outside the door. She looked at the wall recess that held the crockery. This was reality to her. All that was real in the world. Her home, her husband, her son. She had been born here and had never slept away from the place till she was grown up, except when they went camping each year by the Strand, as they called the seashore.

The farm was hers, her marriage portion. She had been the only daughter of Cornelius de Wet. Her three brothers were dead; killed in one way or another, because of their recklessness, the bold blood that Jan had spoken about, the blood that frightened her in their son Jappie.

One brother had been killed by following a wounded lion too

closely, another by a buffalo, the third in rescuing a drowning man.

And now she must leave all this and go with her husband to Capetown, to the hospital, in a motor-car. The doctor had said she must be there, just in case. Besides she knew that Jan would not be happy if she was not near him. Like a baby was this bold husband of hers.

" *Kaapstad*, Capetown," she said to herself. " And in a motor-car." She had never been in a car. But they would get there in a day by car, and it would take five with horses. Besides, the horses had never been in a town any more than she had. And though she could drive them in the open veld and over the mountains she would be as frightened as they in a great town.

A bed had been moved into the kitchen because it was easier to take care of her husband there.

A man put his head into the half door and said, " It is here."

That was the motor-car. " I do not hear it," she said.

" It's a new one," he said. " It moves very quietly."

" You have the gun," the man said.

" *Ja*, Pa, I have the gun." The man and the boy stared at the old Mauser hanging from a nail on the wall. The nail was as old as the house. Hand-forged.

" And the dog," the man said.

" *Ja*, and the dog."

" And your blood," the man said. " The blood that knows no fear."

" *Ag sies*," his wife said. " That damned blood that has been the death of so many."

" And the glory," her husband said. " The blood of the Swarts and the de Wets. A good cross," he said. " *Ja*, a good mixture, like Moskou."

Two men came in followed by the doctor. He said, " We'll take you now, Jan, if you're ready."

" I'm ready," he said.

His wife picked up the little suitcase made of cardboard and a bundle wrapped in a sheet.

The two men picked Jan Swart up, staggering under his weight. His wife followed them to the door and the boy followed his mother.

" Bring cushions and blankets," the doctor said.

" Fetch them, Jappie," the woman said.

The boy went in and stripped his parents' bed. The doctor propped the sick man up, wedging him in the corner of the back seat. " Get in *Mevrou*," he said.

Jappie pushed past her to kiss his father.

" Do not fear for me," his father said. " I cannot die. I can

only be killed. It is not reasonable to think that I shall be the first of my race to die in bed like a woman. *Nie Magtig,*" he said, " when I go to the good God I shall go like a man in my *velskoen.*"

" It's time," his wife said, "that you Swarts learnt other ways to die." And then she covered her mouth with her hand. " I did not mean that," she said, " you are a self-willed man and I expect you will die as you want."

" Fear nothing, Jappie," his father said. " When I was a small son I too was left alone on a farm and held it safe. Why," he said, " when I was your age, in the Transvaal, I had killed two lions, and your *Oupa*, my father, was in the Kaffir Wars when he was only a year older than you. Fear nothing," he said. " And do what your hearts prompts you, for through it courses the wild blood of your people."

" I shall fear nothing," the boy said, his cheek against the wiry blackness of his father's beard. He backed out of the car and his mother held him to her.

" Be good," she said, " and take care of yourself."

At which his father laughed. He had a great deep laugh, and then breathed hard and said, " Doctor, it's a fine thing when laughter hurts a man."

" We'll soon put that right," the doctor said.

His mother got in beside his father and wiped her eyes on a blue cotton handkerchief.

" Do not cry, Ma," the boy said.

Her husband patted her knee with a great hand that looked as if it was made from the root of an oak.

The doctor took the wheel. The car started.

The boy shouted, " Good-bye—*Totsiens*—till I see you."

" *Totsiens*," shouted his father.

The car got smaller. In a few minutes it stopped being a real car and became a toy. Then it stopped being even that. It disappeared behind a shoulder of the hill and was gone.

One of the two men said, " It's gone."

The boy said, " Yes, it's gone."

Then Herman Smit, the bigger of the two, said, " If you have any trouble come over to us."

His brother said, " Yes, come. And one of us will ride over every now and again to see how you are doing."

" *Baie dankie*," the boy said, " indeed thank you, but I shall be all right."

" *Ja*, you will be all right," Herman said, " but all the same we shall come for we are neighbours. And now we must go. It's a long walk back."

His brother said, " We should have brought the horses."

"How can you put horses in a motor-car?" Herman said.

"We could have ridden over and met the doctor here."

"*Ja*, but we didn't. And now our own legs must be our horses." They both laughed because a walk of six miles over the mountains was nothing to them.

"*Totsiens*, Jappie," they said.

"*Totsiens*," the boy said, "and *baie dankie* again."

"We are neighbours," Hendrik said, "and might have been more."

"More?" Jappie said.

"*Ja*. I might have been your Pa, if your Pa had not been your Pa."

"*Ja*," his brother said, "he wanted to marry your mother."

"That is why I never married," Hendrik said. "The best or nothing for Hendrik Smit and there is no woman to compare with your mother for a hundred miles around."

"For a hundred and fifty," Herman said.

"How you show off," his brother said. "Just because you are more travelled than I."

"The more you travel the more *meisies* you see."

"A lot of good it has done you," Hendrik said.

"I have had experiences," Herman said. "Once for a month I lived in a *dorp*, as you well know."

"Bredasdorp," his brother said.

"*Ja*. But I could not stand it, Jappie. The noise. And the people. But we must go." They shook hands with the boy and said good-bye again. Then they turned and walked off, up the face of the hill, the pink heath closing about their knees as they climbed.

He watched them go. They, too, got smaller and smaller. He saw them reach the top of the hill where the white limestone was bare from last year's burning. They turned and waved to him. Then their legs disappeared, their bodies, their heads. For a moment Hendrik's hat was visible, then that too fell below the ridge.

Now he was really alone. Moskou pushed his head into his hand. He reached a little higher than his hand because without bending he could hold his collar.

Moskou was yellow all over, a pale golden chestnut, lemon as it is called, with a thick smooth coat and eyes like yellow black-centred agates. The only other black things about him were his wet nose, and the short hard nails of his round cat-like feet. He stood twenty-seven inches at the shoulder and had the legs of a foxhound. They were strong and straight, set on at the corners of his body. He appeared to have no hocks or pasterns and his body was deep and thick. Round his neck he had a ruffle of thicker hair

from his collie mother, but for the rest of him he resembled a great golden foxhound, the size that in England is drafted, because it is too big, to packs of staghounds. And that, as a matter of fact, was how his grandfather had come to Africa from a famous English pack.

So there was good blood in Moskou. The blood that had hunted the fox and the buck for centuries, and before that had hunted the wild boar, the wolf and the bear when such hounds had been called St. Hubert's and England was still a forest.

His dam, the collie, was a guardian of sheep. Swift and vigilant, the servant and companion of man, and of a breed to which it sometimes seems strange that speech should have been denied. And Moskou combined the qualities of his parents. The great speed, weight and nose of his sire and grandsire, and the wisdom and affectionate nature of his dam.

Moskou was in his prime, four years old. Which is to say only eight years younger than the boy beside whom he stood, slowly wagging his tail, and watching the hill crest where the men had disappeared. His tail was slightly feathered and fastened strongly on to his back. When he was hunting it lashed back and forth like a golden plume. When he got a hot scent he gave tongue, first whimpering, and then as the scent grew hotter giving his deep bell-like bay, which in still weather would carry a mile or more over the mountains.

It seemed as if he knew his responsibility. As if he knew they were alone on the farm, the sole protectors of the homestead and the stock, because he came closer to the boy, his great shoulders rubbing against his thigh.

"Alone," the boy thought as he stroked the dog's head and gently pulled his ears. He was not afraid, but he was uneasy. It was a new experience and a great responsibility. He had been alone with his mother before, once when his father had been gone a week seeking a lost heifer. But quite alone like this he had never been, and the silence of the hills and their mystery fell upon him, covering him like a cloak.

A green and scarlet sugar bird flew into the pomegranate by the orchard gate. It was like a jewel, he thought, though he had never seen a jewel except a brooch of coloured glass that his mother wore. But she had told him of real jewels that shone and sparkled in the light. "Like shining rainbows," she had said they were. Like sugar birds and the shine on the wing of a beetle and the body of a dragon-fly. Her words came back to him as he watched the bird. Then it, too, flew away and the world seemed quite empty.

He thought of his mother and tears came into his eyes. He thought of how she had married his father. She had told him the

tale many times. Of how he had come courting her on the strong wild horses he was breaking, and how her heart had fluttered like a bird in her breast when she saw this great bearded man on a big wild horse. Breaking and training horses and oxen for draft and saddle was his business and his pleasure. He was also a kind of vet., attending animals when they were sick and curing many of them with simple country remedies. He had a great way with dumb things and his wife often laughed about it saying, " I was as tame as a cow with that man from the first."

People paid him for his work in cash and in kind, but mostly in kind, so that he had effects of all sorts on his place. Crippled animals that had been given to him, broken ploughs and carts, poultry, and the like, that he doctored up or mended and sold. People said, " If you can do anything with that, you can have it." And he took it, the plough or the mare, and he mended it, or fattened it, or tamed it, and out of it made enough to buy himself food and clothing. And what was more important to him, he had the friendship of all, for they had only to send for him when they needed help, and were always glad to see him when he came.

At first, though his coming had made her heart flutter, she had not wished to marry him because of his wildness and his lack of education—he could neither read nor write. But when her brothers died and she had inherited the farm and he had said, " My heart, let us go into the mountains together and farm the place," she had agreed. Because otherwise she would have had to sell it, and big as it was—four thousand *morgen* (eight thousand acres)—it was worth little, being all mountain, bush and forest. A place only half-tamed. But as he said, it was not right to sell the home of one's ancestors, the house where one had been born, when there was a man like him ready to help her with it.

His argument and the beating of her heart, which was never stilled when he was near, had convinced her. And for thirteen years they had lived on Baviaansfontein—Baboon Spring, and he had tamed it a little, building dams, clearing bush and ploughing patches of arable land that they had discovered among the trees and rocks. Little fields like big handkerchiefs dropped into the mountains from the sky.

And now all this was in Jappie's hands—the stock, four horses, six cows, four calves, eight oxen, one mule, a flock of twenty almost pure merinos and the poultry. This was all they owned in the world. It was their capital and income. It had been hard come by, bred, worked for, suffered for; and was, if lost, irreplaceable. It took nine months to make a calf. It took three more years to turn it into a cow; or four, into a marketable ox. A horse could be worked at two, but was not at its best until five. And sheep, if they bred more

quickly, died more easily. So that the flock they were trying to breed up grew more slowly than they had hoped.

Now, till they came back, he was the master of all this. The master, but also the servant. For man is the slave of the land and the beasts that require tending upon it. All must be watered and fed, cows must be milked, eggs picked up, sheep herded into their kraals at night, fences kept in order, and the weeds in the lands kept in check, before becoming so strong that they overwhelmed it.

All now looked to him. It seemed to Jappie that even the wheat in the land below the house swung in the breeze towards him saying, " Keep the beasts from eating us up." And the chickens walking on the short grass near the house said, " Protect us at night from the wild prowling things." A cow lowed in a field and her calf answered. And it was he who must bring the cow's overflowing udder to the calf's hungry mouth before evening fell.

His father had said he was old enough, and he was. But only just. His father had said he must not be afraid, and he was not afraid. Not much afraid.

His father had said he could count on the bold blood that ran in his veins, and his father never lied. But his blood and his nerve were untested; he was like a young soldier going into battle for the first time. What he feared was fear—what he was most afraid of was being afraid.

His work he knew. All of it—feeding, milking, herding, weeding. There was no work he could not do, save the heaviest, and that was not for lack of knowledge, but strength. All of it he had done many times before, but never without anyone to talk to about it. This was the first thing he noticed. When he found that the black hen, sitting in a barrel, had hatched ten chicks, and he had put her in the big barn and given her water and mealies and breadcrumbs, there was no one to whom he could say, " The black hen has ten chicks and I have put her in the barn and watered and fed them."

He told Moskou and Moskou wagged his yellow tail, and smiled up at him with open jaws. And so the first day went by, with all the work well done, and after cooking his mealie porridge and making coffee he went to bed in his father's bed in the kitchen. The comfortable smell of the man still lingered in it, and he lay with the dog stretched out beside him, and the Mauser leaning against the wall in the corner and matches and a home-made candle on a shelf behind his head.

The next day passed quickly. There was no time to think till evening when all the work was done, and then he was too tired. All he could do was go over the day's work in his mind. Yes, everything was done. The cows milked, the calves shut in their *hok*, the horses watered and fed, the chickens shut up, the sheep counted and safely kraaled.

He had cut wood for the fire in the morning. He had drawn a bucket of water from the fountain, bailing it out with a dipper from the maiden-hair-clothed cleft in the rocks that was worn with the steps of his ancestors' comings and goings, and the scraping of their vessels, as they had for a hundred years bailed the sweet fresh water from the rocky pool into the buckets they carried into the house. The little path was worn deep with footprints so that it was a green sunken ribbon that led from the house, past the bananas, to the hillside.

"Everything is done," he said aloud, and Moskou wagged his tail so that it thumped on the dung-smeared floor. Jappie was proud of himself. He had accomplished the work of a man this day. I am, he thought, a boy no longer, since I can do a man's work. The responsibility which had weighed on him disappeared, cancelled out by his ability to meet the demands which had been put upon him. He dreamed, half-awake and half-asleep, of the time when the twenty sheep would number a hundred, five hundred. When the six cows would be a herd of fifty, when . . . .and then he slept, his arm thrown out and hanging beside his dog's head. The dog licked his hand and then curled up beside him on the floor.

The next day Herman Smit rode over to see if he was all right.

"*Ja*," he said, "I am all right."

"That is good," Herman said.

The boy put the coffee on the fire, and when he had drunk Herman mounted and rode away.

When he had gone Jappie almost wished he hadn't come, because a loneliness he had not felt before now descended upon him. Five more days went by. Days filled with the work of the farm, the ministering to the beasts and birds who depended upon him, and upon whom his welfare and that of his parents depended.

Then Herman rode over again. He said, "I have had news from the *dorp*, a man passed—Piet Fourie, with a message from your pa."

"My pa?" Jappie said, his heart almost stopping as he spoke. "He is well?" he asked.

"*Ja*, he is well. It is all over. They cut something in him. He has it in a bottle and is bringing it to show you."

"When are they coming?" Jappie asked.

"That is the message," Herman said. "They will be here Tuesday, if all goes well."

"I will pray that all goes well," Jappie said. "I have prayed it every night and morning since they went away, but now I will pray more strongly." In his heart he prayed already, "Dear God, let nothing happen. Let them come back, for this burden is too great for a small son like me."

For though he was bold enough and unafraid with one part of him, the other part cried for the presence of his mother in the kitchen and the sight of his tall father working on the lands. The world was empty without them. Without the clatter of his mother's pans and the sound of her singing as she worked, and the shouts of his father to the horses as he ploughed. They were sounds that were a part of his life, as was the call of the plover in the moonlight, the bark of the baboons in the hills, and the clattering cry of a bush pheasant when it got up in front of him with whirring wings. The sounds of his parents at work were a part of what his ears were accustomed to hearing, and the sight of them about the house and in the lands and fields helped to fill his eyes, rounding off, as it were, the landscape, giving it cause and reason.

"Today is Saturday," Herman said.

"*Ja*," Jappie said.

"There is Sunday," Herman said, "and Monday, and then they will be here, if God is willing."

"*Ja*," Jappie said, "if God is willing." To himself he said, "The day after tomorrow, I will be able to say tomorrow."

"If there is more news, good or bad," Herman said, "I will bring it." Then he mounted and rode away, leaving a space behind him. A space that for Jappie was filled by the thought that the day after tomorrow he could say, "Tomorrow."

Sunday passed, also a working day for a boy alone, since the beasts must be tended. But he read from the Gospel of St. John, which was where his father had left off. Each Sunday his father read a chapter aloud, reading the Bible through from end to end. In that Bible were the names of his forbears, the dates of their births, marriages and deaths. It belonged to his mother and he saw her birthday. She was thirty-one, and then he began working out the dates on the calendar which the storekeeper had given to his father.

Tuesday was the twelfth of September. It was his mother's birthday. That was a good omen. He wished he could bake her a cake or give her some gift. He generally managed to buy something. His father used to take him to the store, ten miles away, for the purpose. But now there was nothing he could do. He could not leave the farm to ride twenty miles. It would take too long.

And then the violets came to his mind. Some were in bloom by the pomegranate trees. His mother loved flowers and if he picked them now they would last. He went out to get them and arranged them in a glass, with a border of their own leaves. Their perfume filled the room. He set them on the little table by his parents' bed, and closed the door to hold it in. Then he went to skim the cream from the milk he had set in pans in the dairy in the morning, and

from there to the stable-yards and kraals to shut up for the night. It was a still evening, very beautiful, and all was well. He watched the last bees coming home to the box hives. And tomorrow he could say, " Tomorrow."

He was up before dawn saying it, " Tomorrow, tomorrow." Then he saw Herman coming on his black horse. " News," he thought. " Good or bad," Herman had said.

And the news he brought was bad. His father was well, but they were not coming until Thursday—not for three days. It was a blow to him. His mother would not be home for her birthday and the violets would not last. Still, there had been plenty of buds, and on Wednesday he would pick more.

" You are a good boy," Herman said. " Your father will be proud of you, for it is not every young son who could have done what you have done. And many would be afraid."

" I have Moskou and the gun," the boy said.

" Nevertheless," Herman said, " many would be afraid. Why," he said, " many men would fear to be alone in so wild a place."

" It's my *woon plek*—my living place," Jappie said. " I know no other place and I am not lonely with the animals and birds about me."

And again Herman rode away, but this time he left no space behind him ; Jappie was getting used to being left alone. As he watched him go he saw the sheep coming in led by *Wit Booi*, the big white *Kapater*—the gelded goat. He had a bell fastened to a strap round his neck, and each evening he got a handful of mealies, as a reward for leading the flock home. Behind him came the ram and, strung out behind them, the ewes and lambs.

That night Moskou was uneasy. He barked once and growled.

Jappie got up, and taking the gun from its nail, went out with the dog. But they saw nothing. All was still. The moon was almost full but there were some dark clouds in the west.

In the morning when he went to the sheep kraal, one ewe lay dead. There was no mark on her, no blood. Perhaps she had died of illness, but when they had come in last night all had been well. They had moved quickly and their eyes had been bright. While he wondered, Moskou began to whimper. He went to the dog, and there on the soft ground outside the kraal was a spoor. It was big and round—a cat spoor, but nearly three inches across. " *Rooikat*," he said—lynx, and then, calling the dog to him he went back into the kraal and, parting the heavy wool round the ewe's neck under the yellow yolk that waterproofed her white skin, he found two tooth marks.

He dragged the sheep to the back *stoep* and fastening a *riem* about its hocks, hoisted it on to a beam and made the *riem* fast.

Later he would skin it and the meat would be good. But now he must make a plan. He worked quickly, milking, watering, feeding, and turning out the stock.

Plan ? Before God, there was only one plan. He must do as his Pa would have done. He must kill the *Kat*, for it would be back. There had been a shower in the night. The scent would be good and the spoor easy to see. Moskou was trembling with excitement as he went into the house again and got the gun.

They went back to the kraal, and patting Moskou he pointed to the spoor and said, " Now go and find him and we will kill him, before he kills more of our sheep."

The dog put his nose to the ground. His tail lashed furiously, and then he was off at a canter. He went up the mountain giving tongue. Jappie ran behind him. The gun was heavy in his hand, and the bandolier bumped up and down against his hip. He could hear Moskou, the bell-like note of his cry coming from not more than a hundred yards ahead, and then he came up to him. The hound had checked. Marking the place where he had lost the scent on a rocky flat, Jappie cast round in a circle with the dog and picked it up again. This time it was hotter and the hound went faster. The note of his voice deepened to a bay.

He is near, Jappie thought, and ran hard. Then in some heavy milk bush he heard Moskou barking loudly. He's treed him, he thought. Then came savage yelps and deep bays, as the lynx broke cover with the dog close behind him.

Jappie thought, he's seen me and he knows I can shoot him down from a tree. With the dog alone he would have stayed there. The lynx ran up a steep cliff, and turned into a small cave in the limestone. It had run in a circle and they were now much nearer than they had been an hour ago. Now we've got him, Jappie thought, because Moskou was barking at the entrance and looking back at him every now and then as he climbed.

The cave gave on to a ledge, and as he reached it he saw the lynx crouched on the floor glaring at him. Its great yellow eyes were narrowed slits, and its lips were drawn back over its bared fangs. Its red body was flat on the ground, its short tail raised. Its black tufted ears were laid back against its neck.

Jappie put up his gun and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. He opened the bolt, re-loaded, and fired again. This time the cartridge exploded but, as he shot, the lynx charged. He warded it off with the barrel, but it bit him in the arm and scratched him from neck to belt with its sharp claws. He felt its breath on his face.

Dropping the rifle he gripped its throat, trying to keep it away from his face, and felt with his other hand for the knife in his belt.

As the lynx jumped at him, Moskou had sprung at it, seizing it in the loin and holding its blunt hind claws away from his belly. The lynx turned away from Jappie as he stabbed it in the side, and swung back on the dog. As it turned, Jappie passed his hand over its back and drove the hunting knife in again behind its shoulder blade. Dropping him completely, the lynx fell on its back and, reaching upwards, seized Moskou by the throat from below. The hound and the lynx became an indistinguishable blur of red fur and yellow skin. A spitting, snarling, growling, bloody mass.

Moskou shook himself free and stood over the lynx, his ruff covered with thick dark blood. With a savage roar he closed in again, his jaws on the lynx's throat. It was dead now—limp, but twitching still. The hound stood over it for an instant and then staggered and fell. Half-skinned alive, the great muscles of his side exposed, one cheek torn out, he lay and turned his golden eyes to Jappie. He died on top of the lynx. His eyes never closed, they simply lost expression and glazed slowly as death came to him.

Jappie sat down on the bloody floor of the cave. They had done it. The lynx was finished, but Moskou was dead and without Moskou the lynx might have killed him. The dog had died so that he might live. He looked at his arm. It was badly torn and bleeding. He took off his shirt and cut it into strips with his knife and bandaged himself as well as he could. When he got home he would put turpentine on it from the bottle on the shelf, and cover it with cobwebs.

He was very cool now. He must fix up his wounds and then fetch the dog and the lynx. He must come back with a horse. He went over the horses in his mind. There was only one, old Meisie, that was tame enough for the job. Horses did not like the smell of blood.

He sat a little longer and then took off his bandolier. It was badly scratched and had helped to save him. He laid it in a corner of the cave and stood the rifle beside it. His pa had said, " You have the dog, and the gun, and your blood." Now he had neither the dog nor the gun, but his blood had saved him, the fury of it that had boiled over when the *Rooikat's* fangs had broken the skin and muscles of his arm.

He went slowly home, his arm in a rough sling made from the rest of his skirt. At the house he took the brandy bottle from the cupboard and drank half a cup. He had never tasted brandy before, and it burnt him but made him feel better. Then he poured turpentine on his wounds. It bit him, stung like a hot iron. He walked up and down until the pain was less severe and then poking some cobwebs from the thatch he covered the wound and bandaged his arm with the strips of old linen that his mother kept rolled and ready for accidents.

Now for Meisie. She was near the house and easy to catch. He bridled and saddled her. He got two reins from the waggon shed and taking the reins he led her up the mountain. Twice he had to rest. When he got near the cave he tied the mare to a tree, and dragged out the dead dog and the lynx. He succeeded in getting them on to a flat rock that was almost as high as the saddle. Then he took off his coat, covered the old mare's head with it, crossed the stirrup leathers and hoisted the lynx from the rock on to the mare's back and tied it, passing the reins from its legs through the stirrup irons. Now for the dog. As he tied Moskou beside the lynx he could hardly see for his tears. Then taking his coat off the mare he led her back.

His mind was very clear. He knew what he must do. He must do it quickly, because as soon as he stopped he knew he could not go on. The cows. The cows must be allowed to run with their calves. He would not be able to milk. The horses could run. If the kraal was left open *Wit Booi* would bring in the sheep. The poultry he would feed heavily and then they must manage for themselves.

He unsaddled the mare, letting the saddle fall to the ground with its burden. Then he washed her back and flanks free of blood because blood would cause her hair to come out. Then, running a rein through a pulley in one of the beams of the barn, he hoisted the dead body of the lynx and tied the end of the rein. It could hang there, beside the sheep it had killed, till tomorrow when his father came.

The grave for Moskou was another matter. It was hard to dig with one hand. He drove in the spade, pressed it home with his foot, and then scooped out the earth, levering the spade shaft against his knee. It was not a proper grave. It was only a scraping in the black ground that ended, when he had dragged Moskou into it, as a mound beside the violet bed. That had been the only place to bury him. That he had been certain of since the beginning. There he would be remembered, and safe.

With the grave finished, and the dog covered under a soft blanket of rich brown earth, Jappie dropped the spade and went into the house. He did not undress. He took off his *velskoen* and fell on his father's bed. His father would be back tomorrow. Until tomorrow everything must take care of itself. He had done what he could and could do no more.

Not even with his blood could he do more. For a while he tossed about. Then he slept. Then he dreamed of his fight again. Saw the green blazing eyes so near his own. Once more saw the bared fangs, the white cheeks, the black whiskers, the tufted ears laid back, heard the snarls, and flung himself about in the frenzy of battle. Then he slept again.

His father looked about the room. Jappie had not heard them come. " Where's Moskou ? " his father said.

He looked pale and much thinner, Jappie thought.

His mother said, " What happened, Jappie ? " She ran and knelt beside him.

" Nothing," he said. " The *Kat* scratched me."

" *Kat* ? " his father asked.

" *Ja*," the boy said. " The *Rooikat*. We killed it. But all is well but one sheep. He killed the sheep, Pa."

" And Moskou ? " his father said again.

" Moskou is dead," he said. " I buried him. *Ja*," he said, " I buried him by the violets under the mulberry tree."

" A brave dog," his father said. " *Magtig*, a brave dog."

" A brave boy," his mother said, stroking Jappie's forehead.

" *Ja*, he is brave," his father said, " but what else would he be with his blood." Then he said, " How did you kill him, Jappie ? "

" With my knife," Jappie said.

" But the gun ? Surely you took the gun."

" I took the gun. But the shells are old, Pa. It misfired and he charged. Moskou took him from behind, but he turned on him . . . and then I drove home the knife."

" We should not have left him," his mother said. " I should have stayed."

" He was big enough," his father said. " To kill a *Rooikat* with a dog and a knife is big enough."

" Moskou is dead." The boy said again and turned his face to the wall.

" *Goed genoeg*," his father said. " Big enough."

* * *

RESCUE PARTY

A man lay in the middle of the street flat on his stomach, wriggling and writhing. A woman pushed her way through the crowd gathered round him.

" Why doesn't someone help this poor man ? "

Getting no reply from the crowd, the officious lady jumped astride the man's back, stated that she had just finished a course in first aid and began to administer artificial respiration.

With this, the man stopped moving and looked back over his shoulder at the woman.

" I don't know what you're trying to do, lady," he grunted, " but I'm trying to fish my half-crown out of this manhole."

VIENNESE PICNIC

"I suppose," said my wife, "our new maid thinks we are nine-tenths crazy"

by WHIT BURNETT

OUR first maid had tried our patience to the limit. So much so that we considered giving up the apartment, which was noisy, anyhow, and moving into one of those convenient *pensions* where someone prepares the meals, without being ordered to do so, and one does not have to wake up the maid, as we did Fanny, tell her what to do, put things into her hand, take them out again, and otherwise wait upon her to the best of one's capacity. In Vienna many of our friends had two and three maids, labour being the only cheap commodity, and we often wondered how they had time for anything else. But the *pensions* depressed us with their smells. And then, in some roundabout way, we heard of Resi.

"The objection," said my wife, "is her age. She's about sixty. But she has one of those conscious faces—you know—she looks round and sees things, and they make some impression on her. She is unlike Fanny."

"Can she cook?"

"It seems she was twenty-seven years with one family as a cook, and the city of Vienna gave her a banquet at which she was presented with a gold watch for honourable service—as a cook."

"Ah, but there you are—a *Wiener Kochin*!"

"Well, we can try her for a couple of weeks. Anybody who can eat the same cook's food for twenty-seven years must either be satisfied or an *echter Wiener*."

The appearance of Resi dispensed with the necessity of advertising in the *Tageblatt* for a maid who could shop in German and cook in French, who did not prepare everything disguised in flour, and who could keep the kitchen accounts with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

Even the first night our Resi proved her worth.

"That looks," said I, "and, in fact, tastes exactly like the *côte de veau aux champignons* we used to get at the café by the Sorbonne.

"Resi," I said, "*wie heisst diese Platte?*"

"*Kalbscotelettes mit Champignons*," she said.

"Well, regardless of the difference in translation, it is excellent."

When the dinner was over, to the last drop of really palatable coffee, which, for small cups Resi made *au naturel*—that is, without the ground figs which go into most Vienna coffee cups—I could not restrain my appreciation. This, after a good meal, usually takes an oracular form, and I requested our new maid to come in for a few friendly words. We Americans are not unlike the Austrians, who sometimes keep a good maid for life. They usually say Americans spoil maids.

"Frau Resi," I began, "it is with a very happy contentment that we finish this meal. It was *sehr gut*. Cooking, we know, is one of the great arts—"

"Oh, *ja*," said Resi, "*das hat Herr Qualla auch gesagt*."

"What did she say?" I turned to my wife.

"She said Herr Qualla said that too."

"H'mm," said I, a little less spiritedly, "that makes two of us, then. In any case, we are pleased to find that you know how to cook something besides *Schnitzels* which are the very negation of nothing, in that, as you know, veal steaks are tasteless to begin with, and to bebread tastelessness is to emphasize insipidity. It is to compose a dish like Austrian mustard, which is as mild as a Viennese kiss and as harmless.

"Oh," I added, seizing the only remaining fork on the table, "these Viennese, with their immoderate inability to disbelieve, to criticize, to experiment, to reform, to taste, to smell, to flirt with novelty! *Ach!* What is *sehr schön* is *sehr schön*. They paint all their walls red. Look upon the flushed elegance of these impossible rooms! Red plush, red paint, oversized impossibility of furniture—And *Schlagobers*! That white whipped-cream knee-deep on everything—on coffee, on architecture, on statues . . . and that statue of Strauss in the Stadt-park! *Mein Gott*, Resi, never any *Schlagobers*! Never give us *Schnitzel*!"

I had grown almost incoherent. As I calmed down, I noticed that the table had been quietly cleared. The room was in order. The short, active little old lady, her hair pulled back tight above her forehead, was standing at pleasant attention, taking in my German, optically and with her ears, with just the proper seriousness.

She said something, in the *Wiener* dialect which my wife grew to understand better than I, and, excusing herself, withdrew to the kitchen.

"Who," I asked, "is this Herr Qualla?"

"Oh," said my wife, "you will hear a lot about Herr Qualla!"

Herr Qualla, as time went on, emerged. He was dead. He had been Therese Fritzwinkel's first employer, and her only employer. He had been a well-to-do leather goods manufacturer, and he had

kept several servants, Resi being cook. He emerged at odd moments, in bed-making, for instance, because it was like this or like that Herr Qualla liked the covers tucked. And Herr Qualla, as the French say, had reason. He must have been, I thought, a heretic from the start, from the very moment of his birth, to have taken exception so to the Viennese method of bed-making.

I grew interested in Herr Qualla. Like myself, he could not abide those feather balloons which, in winter, the Teutonic race use in lieu of blankets and which, being about as wide as they are long, fail to cover a long man's neck and completely expose his feet. What with these and the fact that mattresses are divided into three equal rectangular parts—which, if one turns over in the dead of night, fly apart and assemble around the neck and knees—I have been forced to the conclusion that the Austrians know even less about sleeping than they do about cookery. With two such basic elements of comfort ignored, it is no wonder, I said to Resi, they spend their lives out, in coffee houses, drowning their despair in a tiny cup of coffee and eight or nine glasses of water. No, she said, it is no wonder, but in the early days, that is, before the War, life, like the wine, was otherwise . . .

For the sake of our new maid, whom we immediately took to bragging about all over Vienna, we tried our best to make our daily duties seem intelligent and understandable. We are both, my wife and I, journalists, that is, correspondents abroad for papers in America. And this means that in the middle of all meals urgent messages arrive from New York saying, "*Opposition Prints Assassination King Bulgaria Gods Sake Wake Up*," or long-distance-from-Paris calls asking what about this or who's done that.

This causes us to spring about, make funny noises on new-fangled typewriters, search madly for telephone numbers, dispatch messengers, and what is there tangible about it, anyway? Herr Qualla made leather goods, and I early realized that making leather goods was something tangible. Every Christmas Resi got a new purse from Herr Qualla and he was always bringing important people to the house, buyers from India, others from England, quite like some of the strange persons, she said, who came to eat at our place from Bucharest and Athens after we got fairly settled in the Resi *régime*. But we finally gave up trying to make our work seem reasonable.

"This Herr Qualla," said my wife, "was a solid citizen. I suppose our new maid thinks we are about nine-tenths crazy."

I tested Resi by asking her to pack my bags when I had to go to Roumania and I was surprised at the efficiency with which she did it.

"*Ja, ja*," she said. "*Immer auf der Reise!* Her Qualla was

always going. Turkey. Paris. *Immer Reise !* And you know, *Herr Chef*, he always sent me postcards with *sehr schönen Bildern* on them."

I made a note of the standard set by Herr Qualla, and from Innsbruck, on another trip, I sent a postcard of the House with the Golden Roof, on which the printer had embossed thick glittering gilt which overjoyed not only Resi, but the postman as well.

"*Sehr schön*," said Resi, and thanked me kindly when I returned.

To Resi I was the Herr Chef. This, for a long time, I attributed to my having shown her my collection of menus assembled from all parts of the world, including signed ones from Louis Barraya in Paris, and others, less notable, from Havana to the Golden Horn. The title meant Mister Boss, however, not Mister Chef ; this was surprising enough, but even more of a shock was the discovery that Herr Qualla had had something of a predilection for menu collecting himself—a passion which I had believed until then was mine alone.

"Oh, *ja*," said Resi, looking with interest at the beautifully illustrated French menu headings, "the Herr Qualla was a great collector, but mainly of the recipes. He would call for the restaurant cook and say, 'Tell me, now, what goes in the dish which makes it so good to taste then ?' And he would write down in a book and when he came back from the *Reise* he would come into the kitchen and say, 'Resi, we have tonight *pilaf à la reine Marguerite, oder etwas . . . Ja, er war ein Feinschmecker, Herr Qualla !*"

A number of things happened to us at once. But Resi, I must say, was imperturbable. At sixty, with a lifetime of work behind one, perhaps there are numerous excitements in the world which do not really very much matter. During the hard times just after the war, she told us, she had gone in the tram every other day all the way to Pressburg to get fresh vegetables. I mean, there is energy sewed up in a person like that. Resi was compact with energy, hardihood, philosophy and equanimity. I could appreciate this, after coming back from Athens. I brought back boils.

Nobody I knew, in my generation, ever had boils, personally. And I was rather at a loss. When the colours, from a sunset red, changed to a rather startling emerald, I lost interest in the Austrian press, travel notes, and rushing out to cafés to see people and sip coffee and sit in perspiring pain, and I toppled into bed. We had doctors, the first of whom, in the Vienna fashion, arrived without any thermometer. He gave my family a contemptuous look when it was revealed that we had no thermometer of our own. He, said he, for his part, considered the *Furunkel* trivial, anyway, and departed with all the righteous indignation of a specialist.

When, a day or so later, I began feverishly to pick imaginary

objects out of the air, in a manner of speaking, it was Resi who came to the rescue with an *Umschlag*, or poultice, and a winding sheet, which, when I had been hoisted up on the end, encompassed me about the middle like the first stages of mummification.

" Well, Resi," I said in admiration as I was neatly swished over at two-hour intervals and bound up, " we have discussed many things. Cooking and recipes. Waiters and bad wine. *Gemütlichkeit* and the American tempo. But I assumed that for once, on this occasion, for instance, I had acquired something of a somewhat distinguished nature. Who has boils these days ? I thought only Job had boils."

" Oh, *ja*," said Resi, pinning the binding and not quite getting all my German, which is rather hard to get in the best of circumstances, " when Herr Qualla had *Furunkel* we did the same thing. Two weeks in bed about. *Umschläge*. And this same binding. We always used this."

" My heavens, Resi," I said, as she ended the operation, " what a fellow this Herr Qualla was ! Tell me, though, did he get these boils, *zum Beispiel*, in the same indelicate position ? "

" *Oh, ja, gerade dasselbe !* "

My affliction brought me, not unhappily, as a Scottish friend observed, once more to the Grrrrrand Book. And I must say my ideas of Job as an all-round martyr were subjectively enriched. When the Lord smote his numerous sons and daughters, Job was unperturbed ; when the Lord deprived him of his thousands of oxen, his innumerable asses, his sheep, camels and servants, he took it as an act of Providence. But the day his skin got nipped and he burst out with boils, he called the Lord down proper, heaped ashes all over himself, and cursed the day he was born.

In Vienna, which is a city filled with theorists, they know practically nothing about what to do with a boil. But Nature and Resi and an old general practitioner she recommended and I, we all took our courses, and at the end of a couple of weeks we could sit up sideways with a degree of comfort.

It was in those long days that Resi, to whom my earlier dignity had become somewhat of a memory, for there is nothing enhancing about a *Sitzbad*, opened her heart about Herr Qualla. He had been, of course, a fine man, but like myself, he had his ways.

It was when the beard I had grown to recover my austerity was reaching out tendrils in every direction that Resi brought out the family pictures, partly, I think, to show me what could be done with a beard after the stage has passed when interested friends have ceased inquiring if you are in training for Oberammergau.

" It was a lovely beard," said she. " Blond, at first, like the Herr Boss's and then, as Herr Qualla got older, it went quite white.

Here is Herr Qualla and his wife—she is the one in black there. It was taken in Venice. She was afraid to get in the little boats. You know ? *Schön, net ?* "

I looked into the very eyes of old Herr Qualla, whose private *umschlag* sheet had bound me round. He was a tall, likeable fellow, and he had his beard done in the way I assumed my own would develop. What is called a *spitz* beard, only the peak is not really long. A sort of ample Van Dyke, and yet not so emphatically wedge-wise.

" This other picture was taken," said Resi, " at Baden."

" Ah, Baden," said I. " That's a lovely place."

" *Ja, das hat Herr Qualla auch gesagt.*"

" If we could find a nice place to live somewhat out in the country away from this street noise and yet rather close to the city," said I, " that would be something like Baden."

" Ah," sighed Resi, " it was in Baden that we had the animals."

" Animals ? "

" Oh, *ja*," said Resi, " Herr Qualla had animals. He had two flamingoes, a hedgehog, and an anteater."

" At Baden ?"

" *Oh, ja. Auch in Wien.*"

Resi fondly put the pictures by my bed, where I later inspected them at melancholy leisure—they were so out of the past, of the pre-war, big-hat days, when life was indolent and inventions were scarce and before the motor cars in Vienna became equipped with the most strident horns in the world, the constant blowing of which the chauffeurs mistake for driving.

But the Herr Chef's love of animals, Resi observed—a little critically, I thought—seemed to be confined mostly to dead ones.

I protested.

Well, she explained, take my numerous travels, and what did I actually bring back home with me ? The mewling cat postcard from Paris which mewled when pressed—but dead, *absolut tot, net ?* Right ! And the rubber duck from Zürich which I had been unable to give away to my friend's child in Paris, since the friend was not at home, and which I had brought back to Vienna where it quacked when touched—*schön* enough, heaven knows, but *tot, nicht wahr* ?

" That's right," said I.

" And then there's that blue rug the Herr Boss brought back from Roumania with all the flying *Vogel* on it, *net* ? But those birds don't *feed*. You should have seen Herr Qualla's flamingoes eat dried fish ! "

" I like live cats," I suggested, " which is more than the Viennese do. They like only huge hounds which are constantly messing things up."

"*Ja*, Herr Qualla never kept a dog. The bear was trouble enough."

"Bear?"

"Oh, *ja*."

The bear, it seems, had been sent to Herr Qualla from Russia, and when it arrived at the station, the Viennese luggage men phoned him and said, We have a bear down here for you. All right, said Herr Qualla, open the cage and send him up. Open nothing, said the Viennese, do you think we have lost our reason? Come down and get your bear. Herr Qualla went down, opened the cage, and walked up the streets of Vienna, arm-in-arm, said Resi, with the bear, to his home, where he kept it in the garden.

"He was a nice bear," said Resi.

"No doubt," said I.

Before we moved—and we'd planned it often enough, without, it is true, having anything else in Vienna to move into—we had a little dinner celebration, for which Resi cooked a special *gemüse-pudding* and at the end brought in a *soufflé* which was never surpassed at Pharamond's or Laperouse.

Resi had seen the place—we always took her expert advice by now—and had approved. It was a *schönes kleines Hauserl*, with a seventeenth-century court in front and a large, enclosed garden behind. It was the garden, I think, which decided us all.

"With a garden like that," I said to my wife, "it would be a shame not to have a flock of children."

We reached agreement on that, and even Resi thought that perhaps one child, at a time, would not be so much extra. We would have a nurse, of course, and whatever else you have to have.

"And that run-down fountain bowl, Resi," said I, "what do you think about that? Isn't that just the natural place for trout? Say, half a dozen *aimable*, beautiful troutlings?"

"Exactly," said Resi, putting down the *Poulet à La Normande*, "although Herr Qualla always said carp are hardier."

"True," said my wife, "carp are hardier—if my opinion is at all desired. In my part of the world they don't eat them they're so hardy. We tried once, by cooking a carp between two smooth-shaved planks, baking well, and then throwing the carp out the window and eating the boards. But the carp had toughened the boards."

"I don't mean eat the fish," I said. "Keeping fish is something other than eating fish. You *buy* edible fish. Fish I plan keeping will be tame fish, which we shall give names to."

"*Ja*," said Resi, "that's what the Herr Boss means."

My wife relapsed into a maternal mood and silence.

My beard had got to the point where it could, with dignity, be stroked. I pulled gently and thoughtfully at its end. Its appearance, like the appearance of Resi, had brought about a certain change. Whereas, before Resi appeared, we had both considered Vienna an almost impossible place to live in, her presence brought with it the requisite element of order, of dependability, of regularity, of strength, of persistence in the face of the necessity for bargaining; and the beard had given me a certain inner calm which made me feel at times excessively paternal; I even, in memory, forgave our first poor Fanny, and wondered in what lost circumstances she was now finding herself.

The first week in our new place I discovered a stray cat with a broken leg. We installed it in the garden and fed it in the hope it would recover. It ate lustily and we were greatly encouraged, but the day before I had to go to Egypt on the English trouble it gave up the ghost and died.

My wife—like Mrs. Qualla, fond of cats—was pained for hours, and I promised to bring back something from Egypt to take its place.

"Phooooooeee," said Resi, holding her nose, "*was fur ein Gestank!*"

"I know," said I, kicking the small box to the rear of the crate. "But that's inevitable."

"*Ja*, I know that, too," she said. "Herr Qualla had to bring the same thing with."

"Dried fish," I explained, needlessly.

"*Ja*. It stinks, sure, but to the *Vögel das schmeckt sehr fein*."

When my wife came downstairs, we opened the crates, and the two birds stepped out, gently, gingerly, with that grace which only the pink-legged, long-billed African flamingo knows.

"Hmmmmm," said my wife.

Resi and I, for my wife was a little distraught, busied ourselves with the installation of the birds in the summer house.

"Ah, they go so good with the red chrysanthemums," said Resi.

My wife came down finally, again, to see them properly lodged.

"Call the sad one Qualla," she said.

Resi and I were shocked. I mean Resi was shocked. But we said nothing. Resi withdrew.

I went into the kitchen, a little later, after her.

"Did Herr Qualla have any pictures of his birds?" I asked.

We studied them together. I think our birds were bigger. But Herr Qualla seemed prouder. He stood there, handsomely, with his beard in evidence, between the two fine fowls, with Resi a few steps to one side, smiling youthfully at the camera in a half-abashed way.

I was a little saddened by the faded yellow picture, and by Resi, in whose memory alone Herr Qualla was an actuality.

" Ah, well," said I, " time passes. *Nicht wahr ?* "

" Oh, *ja*," said Resi, wiping an eye.

"What did Qualla call his birds ? "

" Amelia and Wilhelm."

" Ours will be Annie and George."

I made numerous sketches of the two slender birds, which to me seemed the vivification of what the English critic calls " significant form." They thrived, strutted and pranced about, tilted their long bills, gazed entranced at the hardy carp and the few lean trout in the fountain pool and made themselves almost at home.

And then the summer suddenly ceased. One day it was fair and fine, with that brisk clarity of air which brings out the detail of Vienna at its best, and the next day there was snow and November.

The flamingoes, always rather disorientated, shivered in the summer house, into which each night Resi or I had to lead them, since they never seemed to know quite where to go when it got dark. And it was necessary for us to think of winter quarters.

Resi suggested the laundry room, which was where Herr Qualla had housed his own in winter. And then occurred the catastrophe. Flamingoes are delicate birds. Herr Qualla's beautiful male had one day been pounced upon by a strange dog and bitten to death. I can imagine the grief of old Herr Qualla. I would have shot the cursed dog. Resi would recount the incident in a tone of lowered timbre, with almost as much suppressed sorrow in her voice as in the death-bed scene of Mrs. Qualla herself.

What happened to our flamingo—Annie, the female—was something which at first glance appeared funny. She got a fishbone in her throat. It was plainly evident but, Resi said, impossible to reach. Annie coughed. Choked. And Resi, her hair a little dishevelled from attempting to massage the bird's neck, and from holding her grey head while she muttered periodically, " *Jesus Maria ! Jesus Maria !* " puffed heavily upstairs to the dining-room for help.

" *Der Vogel ! Der Vogel !* "

When we reached the poor bird, it had ceased to breathe.

It was rather a trying winter. It is all very well to have a fatherly beard, but it is quite another thing waiting to be a father. We all waited so I would be a father but it was somehow futile. There were no children.

It was a little melancholy, sitting inside the rather large house, looking out on the snowy garden, the fish-pond frozen, the summer house buried in whiteness, and even our interest in chess gone.

" Well, Herr Qualla had no children," I said, one night.

" I know," said my wife, quickly. " And I have heard enough about Herr Qualla. Besides, one hardly ever hears anything about Frau Qualla. Herr Qualla this, and Herr Qualla that . . ."

" They must have been an odd couple," said I, " old Herr Qualla and his wife in black . . . afraid of a gondola. Resi told me today he brought back once from Budapest a live duck in his pocket."

" H'm."

The flamingo, George, downstairs in the laundry, was making a strange noise. Resi had opened the door. He was perhaps pining for his dead mate. Poor George, I thought.

" A duck," I said, " might fit very well on the fish pond."

My wife did not answer. She was reading. For months she had been a little strange, a little moody, which I attributed in part to the fact that lately we had neither of us done much work. The money her people sent her out of the settlement of an estate had caused us to take things easier. It had been perhaps a mistake—she brooded.

" What are we having for dinner tonight ? " she asked.

" Well, I popped into the kitchen on the way up, and Resi's doing a special *Schnitzel.* I used not to like *Schnitzel*, you know, but Resi has a way of making them . . ."

" Damn," said my wife.

" Damn ? " said I. " Why, you haven't sworn for years ! "

" I know," said my wife, bitterly. " Damn, that's the damn trouble. Damn ! Damn ! This town is changing me. Look ! I'm even getting stout. Me ! And we're both getting lazy. Just like the Viennese. Why, I can feel the *Föhn* wind even in the winter."

" It's the winter," I offered. " There wasn't any sun today."

" No, it's everything. Everything. This town. This house. Us. You. Resi. Everything . . . We must get out of here. I am going to America ! "

Resi came up with dinner. It was really excellent. She had found some veal, which nearly melted in the mouth, and she had browned the bread crumbs to a delicious crispness which, after all, the Viennese do know how to do.

We played a little chess in the evening. Resi dropped in for a few moments, at the middle game, and respectfully asked what opening it had been.

" King's pawn," replied my wife.

" *Ah, ja, sehr gut.* Herr Qualla used it—*immer* ! "

In a week or two my wife and I took a little trip to the Dalmatian coast, where, of all places, we found a Siamese cat with pure blue eyes. We brought it back with us. The trip did us good, and my wife's nervousness completely disappeared. We have not yet had

any children but there is probably plenty of time. We are still hoping.

When we got back, Resi was beaming. She is the loyalest of the loyal. We brought her some views of the Jugoslavian coast and when she saw the strange kitten it brought tears to her eyes.

"*Immer dasselbe*," she said, "*wie Herr Qualla!*"

* * *

AFTERGLOW

Here is a selection of final curtains from novels, plays, short stories and poems. Because they truly represent the style of each author his identity should easily be recognized. Allow one point for the title and one for the author, making a possible total of 16. The answers are on page 142.

1. The long flight is over and the girl he loved has died in child-birth. Now, the author sends his hero out into the night:

It was like saying good-bye to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain.

2. So ends a modern short story, already almost a classic.

In the end we just put up a smooth board above his grave along a lonely road. On the board I wrote with an indelible pencil "Cave Canem." Mother was quite pleased with the simple classic dignity of the old Latin epitaph.

3. The ending of one of our greatest narrative poems.

And this true honour from their love-death sprung,—
They were the first that ever poet sung.

4. A recent novel dealing with the reliance of many men on one whose strength remained unbroken till the very end:

Out of the deep dusk he said—and after sixty-eight months it was still a shock to hear him use the words:
"I must say I'm damned tired."

5. This Pulitzer prize play for 1922 still retains an enormous power.

"Fog, fog, fog, all bloody time. You can't see vhere you vas going, no. Only dat ole davil sea—she knows!"

6. A modern poem closes with these two much quoted lines:

This is the way the world ends,
Not with a bang but a whimper.

7. The end of one more search, attained, perhaps, more in the mind than in reality:

He crossed his hands on his lap and smiled, as a man who has won Salvation for himself and his beloved.

8. Yes, you know the author! But the title of this song?

Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty!
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

WINTER'S TALE

This isn't the time for grass to grow.
Consider, good cow, consider

Old Rhyme

At Noon today I and my white greyhound, Mayflower, set out for a walk into a very beautiful world—a sort of silent fairyland—a creation of that matchless magician the hoar-frost. There had been just enough snow to cover the earth and all its covers with one sheet of pure and uniform white, and just enough time since the snow had fallen to allow the hedges to be freed of their fleecy load and clothed with a delicate clothing of rime.

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD, *Our Village*

Wheezy, Sneezy, Breezy

Runneth nose and chappeth lip,
Draught evadeth weather strip,
Doctor wrestleth with grippe
In never-ending rivalship.
Rosebush droops in garden shoddy,
Blood is cold and thin in body,
Weary postman dreams of toddy,
Head before the hearth goes noddy . . .

OGDEN NASH, *Versus*

Scotch Mist

There is a wild garment that still carries nobly the name of a wild Highland clan: a clan come from those hills where rain is not so much an incident as an atmosphere. Surely every man of imagination must feel a tempestuous flame of Celtic romance spring up within him whenever he puts on a mackintosh.

I could never reconcile myself to carrying an umbrella; it is a pompous Eastern business, carried over the head of despots in the dry, hot lands. Shut up, an umbrella is an unmanageable walking-stick; open, it is an inadequate tent. For my part, I have no taste for pretending to be a walking pavilion . . . If I am to be protected against wet, it must be by some closer and more careless protection, something that I can forget altogether. It might be a Highland plaid. It might be that yet more Highland thing, a mackintosh.

And there is really something in the mackintosh of the military qualities of the Highlander. The proper cheap mackintosh has a blue and white sheen as of steel or iron; it gleams like armour. I like to think of it as the uniform of that rather ancient clan in some of its old and misty raids. I like to think of all the Mackintoshes, in their mackintoshes, descending on some doomed Lowland village, their wet waterproofs flashing in the sun or moon.

G. K. CHESTERTON, *A Miscellany of Men*

Remembered Summer

Now in the dark of the year, now in the cold
I will remember the flame of the marigold.
Now when the clouds are grey, when the clouds are low
I will remember how bright forget-me-nots blow
In May
When light brims up in the shining cup
Of the day.

Here in the time of the snow, the time of the rain
I will remember the sun on the shimmering grain.
Now when the leaves hang sere and the ice-wind blows
I will be glad for the beauty and breath of the rose,
And hear
The song of the lark go up through the dark
Of the year.

PATRICIA WENTWORTH, *Beneath the Hunter's Moon*

First Snow

Each winter what delight to snuff up through our nostrils the unexpected, unmistakable odour of snow! There is a fine privilege in that. For snow does smell. It is indeed odorific of the empyrean, of the actual tract of space across which we speed at the heels of the sun. Not only does it smell, but it can take to itself a thousand incredible colours. It is a mistake to imagine that snow is always white. I have seen fields of it in the high Alps of the colour of a red rose-petal; and in the dark northern forests, where the wolves howl under the pines, its shadowy levels towards evening resemble stretches of charcoal. Thrust a stick deep into a snow-bank and one discovers to one's amazement that the interior of the aperture made is blue, is, in fact, the precise colour of the inside of a wave as it stands, for a single second, motionless and curled before its final breaking into lineal froth against the wild sea-banks of pebble or sand.

LLEWELYN POWYS

Piping Hot

Winter has come, fierce is the cold ;
In the sharp morning air new-risen we meet.
Rheum freezes in the nose,
Frost hangs about the chin.
For hollow bellies, for chattering teeth
and shivering knees
What better than hot cake ?
Soft as the down of spring,
Whiter than autumn floss.
Dense and swift the steam
Rises, swells and spreads.

SHU HSI, *c. A.D.* 265–306,
translated from the Chinese by Arthur Waley

Vastly Comfortable

Poor I can't take my daily airing on the Northampton Road, said road being one sheet of ice, and poor everybody is creeping about from fire to fire, wrapped up in shawls and shivering and chattering away deplorably. Four icicles, twice as long as my finger, have been hanging since Sunday, glittering in the powerless sun, from the sash of the library window . . . For all this we are vastly comfortable. The house is so well stoved and fired it is a quite delightful temperature.

LADY LYTTELTON, *Letters from Althorpe*, 1808

Rustle of Spring

O this is winter luxury, not woe,
A mild South-Easter, and a waking sun !
Hollows are flooded, but the ripples run
In April sequence, knowing nought of snow.

Mounting the railway bridge, I can survey
A farmyard, where the geese, a waddling white,
And cockerels, whose ginger thighs are tight
With muscle, make a patchwork clean and gay.

And over these bright Flemish details rise
The architectures of stupendous skies,—
Columns of streaming light upon the plain,
And cloud, a thunderous protagonist,
Skirting the Northern sky, with sweeps of rain,
Lashes the sudden Spring to ground again.

A. J. BULL

ON THE CLIFF

Always the row of faces would be there, like a fringe over the edge of the rock

by F. E. ELLWOOD

IT was one of those perfect summer evenings that need to be shared, and although I hadn't chosen my companion I was glad to have him there. He had walked up the cliff path to where I was sitting, obviously a native of Lys in his faded blue trousers and fisherman's jersey, loose and bulky around the waist. He sat down beside me, and we stared out to sea at the sun slanting across the island and glinting on the water.

I offered him a cigarette; he shook his head.

"A lovely place, your Lys," I said.

"Yes," said the man.

We sat in silence for several minutes, and then he leaned forward suddenly and began to talk.

Yes, monsieur, he said, you would I suppose say it was beautiful, this little island, *bijou de mer* as the tourist books say, and the holiday folk who come here on steamers, with their cameras and the boots with spikes; forgive me, monsieur, for perhaps you are one of them?

Yes, it is surely beautiful now, with the sun on the little fields, and the flowers tangled in the hedges and the sea spray sparkling on the rocks down there. But me, I would leave it if I could, especially now, in the gentle summer evenings with the eglantine in bloom . . . Peaceful, is it not monsieur? But *dangereux*, and small, so small when you cannot get away, when if you threw yourself over the cliff even that would avail you nothing.

Look, monsieur, only two or three feet more and you would be gone, and the earth so crumbly here on the cliff edge. Makes you shiver, does it not, that straight wall of rock?

You might fall on the ledge you can just see if you lean over. But of course you might not, and those rocks so far below are needle-sharp, *Les Aiguilles* they call them. They say these cliffs are four hundred feet from here to high tide. Yes, I see you shiver, and yet you have a—"head for heights" do they say? No, be calm, monsieur, I would not harm you.

Yes, when the eglantine blooms is worst of all, for me. The eglantine and the ledge down there were all mixed up in the dreams I had, ah so long ago. Night after night, always the same dream, the scent of the eglantine, the cliff, the ledge, the rocks and Pierre . . . Above all, Pierre.

There were more stones and earth here between the path and the cliff edge, and you could not see the ledge then as you can see it now; and when you looked down you could think it was only a few inches wide, a bit of unevenness in the face of the rock. No boat could come near to this side of the island—because of the rocks—and even at low ebb tide the water swirled deep round *Les Aiguilles*, as you can see it now, monsieur. And so no man knew about the ledge. Except that I knew, knew it so well in the dream.

I could have told you about the crack in the middle, shaped like a little snake—you can see it now if you lean over, though you couldn't then—and the tufts of sea pinks at the back where it joined the face of the rock. It is granite, of course, this rock, the whole island is granite, and I suppose it will all still be here just the same hundreds of years from now. *Hélas*, monsieur, yes.

Well, every night the dream I had began the same way. First the shadowy part I could never quite remember, coming along the cliff path, followed by men I never clearly saw. That was when I could always smell the eglantine; even when I dreamed the dream in winter, there was the eglantine just the same, and the sweetness of it in the night air, so warm, so soft.

And this is where we would come, just here above the ledge. Then the dream would suddenly be sharp and clear: so that real to me even now is that terrible lurch downwards over the cliff edge, trying to clutch at the heather roots, trying, ah so hopeless it was, to save myself. The sound of my feet crunching on the gravel and the stones, and the terror of it, monsieur; and then the fall down, down, to the ledge below.

And I would be alive, so surprised to be alive, alive on that ledge, with the wall of granite above, and the sea boiling and storming round the rocks of *Les Aiguilles*, more than three hundred feet below.

Then always in the dream I would look up to the cliff top, where we are sitting, monsieur. And although night would be falling I would see quite clearly the faces so far above. Always the row of faces would be there, like a fringe over the edge of the cliff. Gabriel, Simon, Aimé, Jean-Paul—and Pierre. The big, the so handsome face of Pierre. And always his face would smile, and then they would go away, all of them one by one, until I was left on that ledge, alone.

Ah yes, monsieur, Pierre had cause enough to hate me, as I had reason enough to hate and fear Pierre. It was simple, a matter

naturellement, of a woman. A very special woman, the lovely witch, the beautiful Marie. The freshness of sunrise, monsieur, copper hair shining like fire, and a voice clear and gentle as the lapping of little waves in the *Baie de L'Echo*. I, too, wanted the *belle* Marie, but her blue eyes smiled at Pierre the big and the handsome, and not a thought for me.

In so small an island as Lys it is not easy to see the object of your desires, the delight of your heart and body in the possession of another, and for three years I watched and planned. But my chance came at last, monsieur. Ah full well I know how wrong it was, but with Pierre gone, my turn would come, *qui sait* ? But whoever knew, monsieur, or fathomed the heart of a woman ?

In those so far off days no traveller folk from Paris and London brought trade and riches to Lys. But there were other ways, especially on dark nights when the wind was right and the tide was high.

There was a narrow channel, between the treachery of rock and current, leading to the little harbour—not so magnificent a harbour as the one we have now—but safe. Safe for the little boats, returning from the raids on the Breton shores—see how clear is the coast of Brittany from here, monsieur, on a summer evening. Safe, this channel, even on a moonless night, with the lamp hanging in place in the small cave above the quay.

Pierre was the leader of the raids—ah yes, he had courage, and cunning and skill ; and a far-seeing eye, some said he had the evil eye, monsieur. And night after night the lamp would shine, guiding the boats through the safe waters. Until this one special night when I had my chance.

It was a calm night when Pierre left the harbour, Pierre and his crew of four men ; but an hour before they were due to return a storm blew in from the sea, the wind and the rain beating across the quay. The men sitting and waiting on the harbour wall moved for shelter beneath the cliff, and in the darkness and the rain no one noticed when I slid away, up the harbour road until I came to the path leading to the cave where the lamp was shining.

You could not see the cave from the rock where the men were sheltering ; and Pierre would still be far away, so it was safe, monsieur, quite safe. I put out the light in the little cave.

You would see the cave, monsieur, when the steamer brought you in to Lys ? No more than a deep cut crack in the cliffs, and far back into the rock, where it narrows, the shadows lie thick. And how was I to know, when I put out the lamp, that Marie, the flame-haired, the beautiful, loved Pierre Dubois with so great a love as that ? Enough to wait, night after night, in the shadows of the cave, guarding the lamp until he returned ?

Yes, monsieur, it was the next night—when all had been discovered, when all the island knew what I had tried, and failed, to do—that the dreams began. Night after night the dream, and day after day the waiting.

At first only part of the dream, the walk along the cliff in the dusk and the moment of shock when I knew I was falling. That was perhaps the worst of all, when every night I would wake, hot and wet with the terror of it, the terror of that endless falling, falling.

Then one night I dreamt more of the dream, the crash now as I fell on the ledge, bruised and shaken. And the looking up to see the faces on the cliff top so far above. Night after night, now, I lived on that ledge, monsieur, the ledge I had never seen, the ledge that in the fresh sunlight of daytime I could not believe was there at all, except in the dream.

And yet sometimes, when I looked at the face of Pierre, as he watched me and said nothing, and still nothing, even then I believed in the dream.

Then at last, monsieur, came a night when in the dream I was lying on the ledge and still I did not wake. Slowly, with so painful a slowness, I moved to the end of the ledge where it narrows against the rock, and where a young rowan tree had fastened its roots in a crevice. I grasped the little trunk and peered over. There below, was the mouth of a cave, an opening in the rock as wide and deep as a man. This island of Lys, monsieur, is threaded with caves and passages, vast underground storehouses where the great pirate Gaston One-Eye, so many centuries ago, stored his riches.

And as I awakened from the dream the idea came. If only, I thought, I had a rope. If this thing that I dreamt came to pass, I could reach the cave by means of a rope. And in the underground maze I would be safe for years. Perhaps this dream, I thought, is sent to warn me.

That same afternoon I walked along the cliff and I found the place I remembered from the dream, this very spot where we are sitting now. I looked over the edge and there, monsieur, was the bit of uneven rock that I now knew for certain was my ledge—for just in sight beside the ledge were the topmost leaves of a little rowan tree.

Panic took hold of me then. Until I remembered the cave, and ah, monsieur, I laughed aloud then. A rope. Why not a rope? A rope thrown to the little rowan tree, so that when this thing happened, as I knew now it surely would, there it would be.

But, monsieur, I had rejoiced too soon. I looked across the sea. The sun was low and red, and long shadows reached from the rocks across the water. Darkness would soon be falling, and to my nostrils came the scent of eglantine from the bushes beside the path. It could be tonight, the fulfilment of the dream. It could be now. I

looked behind and around me. Nobody was there. I ran. Ran along the cliff, down the harbour road to the jetty.

The light of the sunset was fading as I found the coil of rope and climbed the harbour road. I might have heard the footsteps behind me, monsieur, had I stopped to listen. But all I did then was run. Up to the head of the cliff, along the path, frightened, breathless, until I came to this place where we are now.

I lay full length on the turf. The scent of the eglantine was sweet and the air warm and soft as night began to fall. I took the coil of rope and swung it downwards. It caught on the gorse and I drew it up again. I coiled it again, monsieur, this time throwing it in a wider arc. It missed the little rowan tree and I stood up on the edge of the cliff. This time the rope snaked high over the gorse and heather and then I could see it was safely tangled in the branches of the little rowan tree. I looped the loose end lightly round a gorse bush beneath the edge of the cliff, from where, when need be, I could pull it free from down below. The relief, ah monsieur the relief.

But something was wrong. Now at last I could hear the footsteps. I turned quickly. There were the shadows I had seen in my dream, shadowy figures moving towards me along the path. I moved back, fear like a cold hand on my heart. Something, a small stone or a grass root, gave way. I tried to regain the path, I tried to clutch the heather roots. But it was too late. There already was the sound of my feet crunching the gravel and the stones, and then all the terror and despair of the dream, the falling, falling down to the ledge below.

Ah yes, there was the ledge, just as I had so often seen it, the snake-like crack, the sea pinks, the wall of rock above—and below, so far below, the dark water and the menace of *Les Aiguilles*. And there was I too, alive and so surprised to be alive.

As the last of the light faded I looked up and there were the faces like a fringe on the cliff edge, Gabriel, Simon, Aimé, Jean-Paul, all the crew of the boat I had once hoped never to see again. And Pierre. The other faces were still and cold, but the face that was Pierre's smiled. And then, monsieur, one by one they went away, and I was alone, and the darkness on me.

Ah monsieur, the loneliness, the pain of that night. Had I not known that when the dawn light came there, waiting, would be the rope and the cave, surely I must have died . . .

What did you say, monsieur, "All's well . . ." ? Ah *mais non, monsieur, hélas.*

Monsieur, there came the half light of dawn. Slowly, with pain, I crept along that ledge towards the little rowan tree. The rope was there, hanging in the branches, and gently and carefully I drew it free. I fastened it about the trunk of the little tree, and then, to measure the distance, I looked down towards the cave.

Monsieur, there *was* no cave.

You are surprised ?

Escape, how did I escape, you say ? Ah no, there was no escape, not for me. I cannot tell you of the days that followed, the endless-seeming days and nights until at last in truth the end did come.

See you are pale . . . but you have nothing, nothing at all, to fear from me. Me, I am doomed ; doomed to stay here on the island that once I loved, but now have learned to hate.

And that, monsieur, is not all. For here with me is Pierre the arrogant, the pitiless, true descendant of his great and fearful forbear, the pirate Gaston One-Eye. And with him is the *belle* Marie. So that day after day, year after year, I am doomed to watcht hem as they laugh and lie together in the heather, to hear their voices, carefree and happy, wherever I go on this tiny island. To see the lovely Marie, fiery hair garlanded with eglantine in bloom. To him the flower is love triumphant, to me it is death and hell itself.

Is it not unjust, monsieur ? Did he not kill me with his evil eye ? Was his guilt no less than mine ? *Mon Dieu*, monsieur, the merciless cunning ! That he should put my life in terror with the dream were bad enough. But the false ending that lured me to the slow and terrible death, that I should see in the dream the cave, the means of escape—so that I should find it not there, when the time came . . . To contrive that I myself, and not he, should compass my own end ! Ah, monsieur, surely there is no greater wickedness in the world ?

For two hundred years have I endured this. How long more ? *Hélas*, monsieur, I fear for ever . . .

A flock of seagulls screamed over the edge of the cliff ; a breeze rustled the bracken, then in the growing darkness the silence was complete. I turned to my companion. He was no longer there.

Perhaps it was imagination, perhaps some fellow holidaymakers returning to the island hotel. But a tenor voice came faintly over the curve of the downland behind me :

". . . *Touse i vi de bel atour :*
La colour
Ot fresche com rose en mai . . ."

And then another voice, a woman's, soft and clear, full, round and —yes, satisfied :

". . . *En non Deu, j'ai bel ami,*
Cointe et joli . . ."

* * *

Some people are so averse to physical activity they won't even exercise their franchise.

J.W.S.

★ *"Students were steadfastly pursuing the nurses with sprigs of mistletoe. The chase was not exacting." Christmas is in the air! The hospital ward is gay with decorations. With a zest and concentration never dreamed of in more legitimate connections, the students work up an astonishing entertainment.*

SPRIGS OF MISTLETOE

by RICHARD GORDON

THE patients saw plenty of Christmas Day. They were woken up by the night nurses at five a.m. as usual, given a bowl of cold water, and wished a Merry Christmas. After breakfast the nurses took off their uniform caps and put on funny hats.

When I arrived on the ward in the middle of the morning, I found a wonderful end-of-term spirit abroad. People were allowed to do things they felt forbidden even to contemplate at any other time in the year. Smoking was permitted all day, not only in the regulation hour after meals; the radio was turned on before noon, and, as if this wasn't enough, the patients were issued with a bottle of beer apiece.

Sister was visiting each of the beds distributing presents from the tree, and two up-patients, dressing-gowned old gentlemen with a brace of alarming blood pressures, were dancing the Highland fling in nurses' caps and aprons. Three or four of the students were steadfastly pursuing nurses with sprigs of mistletoe: the chase was not exacting.

As I entered the ward a giggling nurse ran out of the sluice-room followed by Tony Benskin, who had a look of intense eagerness on his face.

"That's enough, Mr. Benskin!" she cried. "You've had enough!"

Benskin pulled up as he caught sight of me.

"I thought you said you were coming early to test urine," I remarked.

"One meets one's friends," he explained simply. "One must be social. After all, it's Christmas. Come in the sluice-room. I've got a bottle."

I followed him in.

"And I thought you were scared of nurses."

"Delightful creatures," said Benskin, beaming. "So refreshingly sex-starved."

I noticed the gin bottle he had invited me to.

"Good God, Tony," I said. "Have you got through all that so early in the day?"

"It's Christmas, old boy."

"Tony, you're sloshed already."

"What of it? There's plenty more gin in the instrument cupboard. Grimsdyke hid it there yesterday. After all, it's Christmas. Have a drink."

"All right. I suppose it's my party as much as yours."

The gin in the instrument cupboard was finished by midday, when Dr. Lionel Loftus appeared with his wife, and his two ugly daughters that were produced every Christmas-time like the decorations, but without success. He got a hilarious reception.

"Here's the old Dean!" cried Benskin, leaping up on a bed. "Three cheers for the Dean, boys! Three cheers for old Lofty! Three cheers for the jolly old Dean!"

The Dean stood, all smiles, in the doorway, while three cheers were given and the ward broke into *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow.*

He kissed Sister under the mistletoe, presented his housemen with a bottle of sherry, and shook hands with the patients. His own part in the programme was fairly simple: all he had to do was to put on a chef's hat and carve the turkey in the middle of the ward. He was not good at carving and the last patients had a cold meal, which was the disadvantage of eating Christmas dinner on the medical side of the hospital. The surgeons were naturally more skilful, and Sir Lancelot Spratt, the senior surgeon, had been known to slit a bird to ribbons in a couple of minutes.

During dinner Grimsdyke appeared. I was sitting on a bed with my arm round a nurse. Both of us were blowing squeakers.

"Hello, old boy," Grimsdyke said in a worried tone. "Merry Christmas and all that sort of thing. How are you feeling?"

"Fine! Have a drink."

"All the boys are pretty high, I suppose?"

"Of course. Benskin's as stiff as a plank."

"Oh God! I hope he'll be all right to go on this afternoon."

I put my squeaker down contritely.

"I'd clean forgotten about that! Perhaps we'd better go and see how he is."

"Where's he got to?" Grimsdyke asked nervously.

The nurse told him. "I saw him going into the sluice-room. He said he felt tired and wanted a rest."

Benskin was resting when we found him. He was lying on the stone floor with his head against the base of the sink.

"Wake up! Wake up!" Grimsdyke commanded, with an anxious note in his voice. "The show, man! We're due to start in half an hour!"

Benskin grunted.

"Oh Lord!" Grimsdyke said in despair. "We'll never get him on the stage. . . . Tony! Benskin! Pull yourself together!"

Benskin opened his eyes fleetingly.

"Merry Christmas," he muttered.

"Why not try an ice-pack on his head?" I suggested.

"Or an intravenous injection of vitamin C? It's supposed to oxidize the alcohol."

"We'll try throwing water over him. It might be some use. Give me that measuring-glass."

We poured a pint of cold water over the ineffective actor; he lay dripping like a cherub on a fountain, but equally inactive.

"Let's hold him by the arms and legs and shake him," I said.

"Do you think it would do any good?"

"It may do. Shock therapy is sometimes effective."

Grimsdyke held Benskin's arms, and I took his feet. He was a heavy man, and we strained as we lifted him.

"Ready?" Grimsdyke asked. "Right—one, two, three, shake."

We were still shaking when the sluice-room door opened and Sister Prudence walked in.

"Hello!" she said. "What's up?"

"Mr. Benskin fainted," Grimsdyke said quickly, "I think the excitement was too much for him."

Sister Prudence shot a diagnostic look at the patient. Her professional training enabled her to act swiftly and decisively when faced with an emergency.

"Nurse!" she called, starting to roll up her sleeves. "Run down to the accident department and bring up the suicide box. Take your jacket off, Mr. Grimsdyke. You can help me with a stomach pump."

Benskin's stomach was washed out with bicarbonate solution, which was always kept handy to frustrate local suicides. He was given a cup of black coffee and a benzedrine tablet. By that time he maintained that he was ready to face his audience.

"It will be a pallid performance," he admitted thickly. "But at least I shall be on my feet."

The show was due to open in Fortitude ward, on the male surgical side.

"Always test on men's surgical," Grimsdyke said. "Surgical patients are either well or dead. They don't hang about in the miserable twilight like medical ones. Besides, half the medical patients have got gastric ulcers, and who can feel jolly on Christmas Day after a poached egg and a glass of milk?"

Our troupe arrived made-up and in the costume of white flannels and shirts with green bow ties that Grimsdyke had ordered. The stage was improvised on the floor at one end of the ward out of the screens otherwise used to hide patients from their companions. Grimsdyke, who succeeded in looking smart in his flannels, worried his way round his indifferent actors like the headmistress at a kindergarten play.

"Are we ready to start?" he asked anxiously. "Where's the piano?"

"It looks as if we've lost it somewhere," I told him.

"It doesn't matter about the piano," John Bottle cut in. "We've lost the beer as well."

Grimsdyke and Bottle disappeared to find these two essential articles of stage furniture, while Harris muttered the words of *Polly Perkins* over to himself repeatedly. Sprogget stood in the corner with a look of painful concentration on his face, talking like a three-year-old girl, and I rubbed red grease-paint into Benskin's white cheeks.

"What are you feeling like now?" I asked him.

"I often wondered what it was like to be dead," he said. "Now I know. Still, the show must go on. One cannot disappoint one's public."

The piano, the actors, and the beer were collected on the same spot; the audience, who had been waiting uncomfortably on the floor, on the edge of beds, or leaning against the wall, began a burst of impatient clapping.

"For God's sake!" said Grimsdyke frantically. "Let's get going. Are you ready, Richard? What the hell are you doing underneath the piano?"

"I seem to have lost the music for the opening chorus," I explained.

"Play any damn thing you like. Play the closing chorus. Play *God Save the King!*"

"I'll vamp."

The screen representing the proscenium curtain was pushed aside, and the only presentation of *Jest Trouble* took the boards.

The performance was not a great success. It happened that Mr. Hubert Cambridge, the surgeon in charge of Fortitude ward, had a desire to remove two hundred stomachs during the year and

had approached Christmas in a flurry of gastrectomies. As the patients had not a whole stomach between them and each had suffered a high abdominal incision that made even breathing painful, they were not a responsive and easy-laughing audience. The nurses, students, and doctors who made up the bulk of the house were already unsympathetic to the actors because of the long wait for the curtain to be pulled aside when they could have spent longer over their dinner.

Only the cast, who (with the exception of Benskin) had been going strongly at the beer, thought themselves devilishly funny.

The opening chorus successfully defied the audience to make out a word of it, then Grimsdyke told a joke about a student and two nurses that extracted a languid round of clapping.

The next item was Benskin's conjuring act. He appeared in a black cape and a tall magician's hat, and scored instant applause when, during his preliminary patter, John Bottle was seized with the idea of setting a match to its peak over the top of the backcloth. The hat blazed away for some seconds before Benskin realized what had happened and angrily put it out in a bowl of gold-fish.

His proudest trick was pouring water from one jug to another and changing its colour in the transference; but his aim was not good that afternoon and at his first attempt most of the liquid slopped on to the ward floor.

"Nurse!" came an easily audible hiss from the back. It was Sister Fortitude. "Go and clear up the mess that young man's making!"

A nurse with a mop picked her way through the audience and started swabbing round the performer's feet while he pretended that he, out of everybody else in the room, did not notice her. After that he angrily produced a string of flags out of a top hat and left the stage in a huff.

The rest of the performance was received by the audience with good-humoured apathy. Harris made his appearance to sing *Little Polly Perkins* in a Harry Tate moustache, standing in front of Bottle, Sprogget, and Benskin, who joined in the choruses. Towards the end of the third verse a roar of laughter swept the audience. Harris felt the glow of success in his heart, and sang on lustily.

When the laughter rose to a second peak a few seconds later he hesitated and glanced behind him. The cause of his reception was obvious at once. Benskin, finally overcome, had been suffering a sharp attack of hiccoughs before being sick in the corner of the stage. At that moment the lights fused, and no one thought it worth finishing the performance.

At Christmas-time came the few hours of every year during

which the official barrier between students and nurses was gingerly raised: there was a dance in the nurses' dining-hall which the young men were allowed to attend.

The Nurses' Home at St. Swithin's was known, with a fair degree of accuracy, as the Virgins' Retreat. The dance disorganized life in the Virgins' Retreat for some weeks before the French chalk went down on the floor. Each nurse's escort was discussed in such minute detail that the process could have been justified only if the young lady expected to remain in his arms for the rest of her life. On the evening of the dance, the girls flew off duty, bathed, powdered, dressed, and scented themselves, and went down to meet their men under the marble eye of Florence Nightingale in the hall.

As I had no particular attachments in the hospital at the time, I approached a gawky nurse on the ward called Footte and asked, with a smirk, if she would be my consort. She gave her gracious acceptance. Shortly afterwards I met Benskin in the courtyard.

"Are you going to the nurses' hop?" I asked him. "I've just let myself in for taking the junior staff on Prudence."

"You bet I am, old boy! It's the biggest party of the year."

I was surprised.

"Is it? I thought it was a strictly teetotal affair."

"And so it is. You don't imagine the Matron would allow liquor to befoul the chaste floors of the Virgins' Retreat, do you? It's as dry as a bishop's birthday. This has the effect of making everybody get a big enough glow on beforehand to last them the night, and results in some interesting spectacles."

On the evening of the dance Benskin and I spent an hour of determined drinking at the King George before going to the Nurses' Home to meet our partners. Benskin suggested a few scoops.

"Bad form to arrive too early, you know," he explained to the girls. "People think you want to hog all the sausage rolls."

The four of us went back to the King George. We settled ourselves at the bar. After some time Miss Footte started looking mistily at me and stroking the back of my neck.

The first time I looked at my watch it was after ten.

"It's getting on," I said. "Hadn't we better go?"

"Perhaps we'd better." Benskin called to the landlord, better known as the Padre, "Padre! I say, how about a little this-and-that for the hip?" He handed a silver flask across the bar. "There's a long way to go yet."

"Certainly, sir! How about you, Mr. Gordon? If I might advise you, sir, from my experience . . ."

"I'll have a bottle of gin," I said. "Can you put it on the slate until the New Year?"

"Of course, Mr. Gordon. You get your allowance quarterly, don't you? Anything you like, sir."

Arm in arm, all four, we went singing to the Nurses' Home.

The gaunt dining-hall was dripping with paper-chains, and a five-piece band was stuck up on a tinsel-ringed dais in one corner. There was a Christmas tree, a running buffet on trestle tables, streamers, paper hats, Chinese lanterns, and all the standardized trappings of respectable jollity.

On a stage at one end, opposite the band, there sat throughout the evening the Matron, in full uniform. Next to her, also uniformed, were the three Sister Tutors. Behind them were five or six of the senior Sisters in a row, and the lot were separated by sandwiches and sausage rolls on small tables. They were a jury that was constantly forming unspoken verdicts. Very little escaped them. If a girl danced with too many men or too few it was remembered until the end of her training, and if she turned up in an off-the-shoulder gown she might as well have had "Hussy" tattooed across her clavicles. There was an interval between dances when we arrived. We pushed our way up to the buffet.

"Look at that!" Benskin said in disgust, pointing to a row of glass jugs. "Lemonade!"

He reached across the table and picked up a half-full pitcher.

"I think we might stiffen this a little," he continued, with a shifty glance over his shoulder towards the stage. "Hold the jug, old boy, while I get my flask out."

He tipped his flask of whisky into the drink and I added half my bottle of gin.

"That should be more like it," Benskin said with satisfaction, stirring the mixture with a jelly spoon. "Guaranteed to bring the roses to the cheeks. One sip, and never a dull moment afterwards."

He was still stirring when Mike Kelly appeared at the table with one of the operating theatre nurses.

"Mind if we join the party, Tony?" he asked. "I've got some rum in my pocket."

"Put it in, old boy!" Benskin invited him. "Nothing like a lemonade cocktail to get the party going. That's right, pour the lot in. You didn't have much left, anyway."

"The best part of half a bottle!" Kelly said indignantly. "It's all I've got, too."

"Fear nothing," Benskin said, stirring rapidly. "I know of secret caches. Now! Let us taste the devil's brew." He poured a little in six glasses and we sipped it with some foreboding.

"It's strong," Benskin admitted, gulping. "Odd sort of taste.

I suppose that rum was all right, Mike ? You hadn't been palmed off with a bottle of hooch, had you ? "

" Of course it was all right. I got it off the Padre."

" Oh well, it must be the lemonade. Cheers, everyone."

We had almost finished the jug when Harris pushed his way into the group.

" You dirty dogs ! " he exclaimed angrily. " You've pinched my blasted jug of lemonade ! I had half a bottle of sherry and some *crème de menthe* in that, too ! "

I did not remember much about the dance. Isolated incidents came back to me in flashes the next day, like fragments of a dream. I recalled two gentlemen doing the old-fashioned waltz with their partners, catching the tails of their coats together, and covering the floor with broken glass and the best part of two bottles of gin ; other gentlemen overcome with the heat and having to be assisted to the fresh air ; Nurse Footte laughing so loudly in my arms I noticed her uvula waggling in the back of her throat, and my thinking how horrible it was.

All the students were drunk, and the Matron, being unaware of such things, beamed and thought she was giving these high-spirited young men a great evening. The next morning, however, she democratically joined in cleaning the hall herself and was horrified to find a hundred and thirty empty spirit bottles tucked away in the potted palms, behind the curtains, in the seats of the sofas, and on top of the framed portraits of her predecessors in office.

The nurses' dance marked the end of the Christmas holiday at St. Swithin's. Everyone knew that the next morning the operating theatres would start work again, lectures would begin, and the students would troop round the gloomy wards with their Chiefs.

But that night it was still Christmas, and the hospital was alive with marauding students who leaped on the night nurses while they made cocoa in the ward kitchens. And they, dear girls, screamed softly (so as not to wake the patients) before surrendering themselves to their students' arms. After all, there had to be some compensations for being a nurse.

★ ***Time for quick thinking—and some rapid shots at the soulless examiners ! In next month's episode from Richard Gordon's " Doctor in the House " the reader enjoys a first-hand account of the rigours and humours of " Finals."***

LOVE LETTER

"You can only save one of us, Leland, you know that," she said

by PAMELA FRANKAU

THE noise of the aircraft grew fainter in Leland's ears; it became a throbbing lullaby as he drifted towards sleep. Across the aisle, in the dark, the Englishman was still talking; the Englishman with the clipped, knowledgeable voice.

"My dear fellow, I was a pilot in the er—recent unpleasantness, and I know. We're flying on two engines . . . listen . . . we'll be lucky if we make it."

Drowsy and detached, Leland thought, "How will it feel if we *don't* make it?" They were, he knew, still over the Atlantic; two hours off the Newfoundland coast; two hours . . . the clouding weight of sleep pressed his thoughts down.

Now he was dreaming. The noise of the failing engine was in the dream and Jane was sitting beside him. "Crash coming," said Jane's voice in his ears. He saw her clearly, the dazzle of her smile and the lion-coloured hair; the broad white forehead and the brown eyes. She said, "So we're going to die."

Then in the dream, the aircraft struck and the cabin began to fill with water. He grasped Jane's hand. At once Viola turned and spoke to him in her light, thin voice. Viola was sitting across the aisle, in the ex-pilot's seat; he could see her clearly too; her face of a pretty, harassed clown, with ruffled hair and shiny skin. "You can save only one of us, Leland, you know that," she said. And the water rose.

"Hello . . . hello. Global Airways announces the arrival of Flight 001 from London to New York. Scheduled wait, forty minutes."

Mark Lewis, passenger on this flight, led his chance companion to the breakfast counter; she was an attractive woman; she knew his name and his circle of friends; this was being an amiable and easy journey. He ordered coffee for them both. The voice came again over the loudspeaker.

"Hello . . . hello. Maritime Airways announces further delay of approximately four hours for maintenance on Flight 222 from London to New York."

All along the buffet and the waiting-room, the passengers on Flight 222 became instantly identifiable. In the brisk light of early morning they looked unshaven or unpowdered according to their sex. Some, sprawled on sofas, sat up to hear the announcement repeated, then flopped down to sleep again. Some were playing cards; some were writing letters. All were listless and humiliated, a scatter of tired, adult "Babes in the Wood."

"Sooner them than me," the blond, well-tailored Mark said complacently. Then he saw Leland bowed over one of the writing-tables and added. "Looks as though my future brother-in-law is among the unlucky ones."

"Your future brother-in-law?" His companion lit up with curiosity, "Wouldn't that be Leland French?"

"It would. Over there."

"He's very good-looking, isn't he? I always heard he was." Like a dark, neat little hawk, she decided. "Are you pleased about the prospect of the marriage?"

"Very pleased. And it has a certain inevitable look to it," said Mark.

"Meaning?"

"Why, Leland's life and mine have always interlocked. At college; in business; and then quite by chance, we found that we'd bought houses within two miles of each other. When he got the chairmanship of Merrick Sloane, I'd just taken over Homer's; making us," said Mark with a grin, "rival heads of the two best publishing-houses in New York."

"And then he falls in love with your sister, Jane."

"And now he's got four hours at Gander and I've got forty minutes. Better commiserate with him, hadn't I?"

"Tell me just one thing; if I don't sound too curious. His wife . . . what happened to her?"

"Nothing, as far as I know. Divorce coming up any minute now," said Mark.

"She's a good poet, isn't she?"

"Viola French is a damned good poet," said Mark, watching the back of Leland's head; "but good poets don't make good wives, that's the trouble."

"Unfaithful?"

"Worse. Untidy. The sloppiest housekeeper in five continents; vague as the moon and no *savoir faire*."

"She sounds the absolute antithesis of Jane."

"Just that. Poor Viola; in a way I'm fond of her, ink on her nose and all," said Mark, "but hell, it had to break."

At the writing-table, Leland French rubbed his eyes, shook

his neat shoulders and lit a cigarette. He blotted the letter to Jane. He took the other letter out of its envelope; the letter he had written to Viola in the plane the night before.

My dear,

I meant to write again last week, but London as usual filled itself with dates and dooms: one of the dates and the worst of the dooms being little Poliakovsky with two narrative poems: each and every syllable as bad as "Tiger Hair"—remember fighting your way through that manuscript in the heat-wave?

You must forgive my silence; this one isn't due to stalling. I'm not stalling any longer now.

I'll be staying in New York, at my club. Time and date of our meeting must be chosen by you. I know it's easy to say "Let us always be friends" and not mean it. I'd like to put on record that I do *mean it: that from my side of the counter at least there's the genuine wish to go on seeing you and hearing from you and talking to you.*

Could you send my new shirts to the club? The six blue ones in the bottom drawer. And I'd like my Chesterton poems; the collection you gave me; on the bedside-table.

Thank you, my dear; I'll be waiting to hear from you; and—do I have to say it again?—I am so deeply sorry about everything.

Leland.

N.B. One thing I forgot in last week's letter; I met Mrs. Close in Piccadilly; she looked just the same, only larger:—tiny hat like a meringue—talked about founding a club for Greek Thought.

He folded this letter, and then picked up his letter to Jane.

Beloved,

Here I sit; tethered in Gander, straining towards you in my heart, talking to you because I can't not *talk to you, and cursing the four hours' delay that the bastards have just announced. Four hours in terms of this flight equals four years.*

Hell—how I pray that you won't go to the airport without checking first on our time of arrival. But you won't. (You who always do the efficient, or the right, or the intelligent thing so instinctively that you sometimes frighten me.)

God knows what time I'll get in this evening. God knows what time I'll hold you to my heart again. God knows whether you'll want this scribble anyway.—L.

This letter also he folded. Then he smiled wistfully. The sense of guilt faded. He felt a sudden compassion for his own dilemma, that had ceased to be a dilemma at last. "It had to break,"

he thought and then Mark Lewis's hand on his shoulder made him jump.

" Bad luck . . . Just what would you give to change places with me ? " Mark was saying.

" I hope I'm too much of a gentleman. Judging from what our machine did over the Atlantic, it may well fall to pieces on the next hop."

" Oh nonsense. Jane meeting you ? "

" She was : I talked to her from London last night : hope she won't, now." He was noting again the unspectacular quality of Mark's good looks : if there could be a dull version of Jane's face, Mark's was the dull version.

" You'll be there by two o'clock, New York time, lucky devil," he said. " Driving down to the country tonight ? "

" Yes."

Leland hesitated. " Would you mind mailing two letters for me ? "

" Sure," said Mark. Courteously he looked away while Leland addressed the envelopes. " Thanks. And in the event of any little trouble between here and there, I can trust you to give my love to Jane . . . and then set about pinching all the best authors on my list, can't I ? "

" You can," said Mark, patting his shoulder.

" Hello . . . hello. Global Airways announces the departure of Flight 001 for New York. Will passengers please put out their cigarettes and proceed to the aircraft ? "

" Happy landings," Leland said. He walked with Mark to the gate ; he watched the runnel of fortunate passengers move across the tarmac to the throbbing silver shape of their plane : behind it the sun blazing, the blue sky, the green pines. He stood still a long time staring ahead of him.

Viola French said to the man with the greying hair and the square chin : " Ralph, I'm sorry, but the answer has to be no. Would you like to finish your iced tea or would you rather have a proper drink ? "

As she rose from the garden chair under the willow, she hoped that he would go soon. She did not like hurting people. Besides, there was half a poem in her head and she wanted to get it on paper. And if he stayed much longer she would have to cook dinner for him : her own dinner was planned : a scrambled egg eaten at her writing-desk. Surely he didn't want to stay for dinner ? Even her iced tea had been very nasty. " I am the kiss of death in the kitchen," she said firmly as though this would help him to be happier.

" We could afford a cook," he murmured.

" I've told you," she said gently, " I can't marry you when I still love Leland."

" But do you ? Isn't it just a dream in your head, darling ? I can't help thinking that if you loved him, you wouldn't let him go."

" It doesn't work like that. For me."

Ralph grunted, " Well, it should," and stared at her with—it must be—loving pleasure. She did not know why. She had taken no trouble with her appearance and, being a martyr to detached self-study, she knew just how she looked.

There was the fluffy brown hair that lost its contours three hours away from the hairdresser's ; the petal-thin shiny skin from which powder vanished at perplexing speed ; the rouge at a different level on each cheek-bone.

Her face, as Leland had told her years ago, was the face of a clown, with wide melancholy eyes, turned-up nose and big mouth. And though her body was neat and straight enough, her summer dresses had a way of creasing and crumpling when other women's dresses stayed in shape. This green cotton was already a mass of wrinkles and she had spilled iced tea in her lap. When she stood, as now, caught in perplexity by Ralph's loving stare, she knew that she looked awkward and spindly, like a schoolgirl in a hurry.

Still he would not let her go.

" Tell me," he said, " what you really feel about Jane Berisford ? "

Viola bit her forefinger thoughtfully :

" What could I feel ? Except hopeless admiration ? I don't mean I envy Jane. I wouldn't want to compete in her fields any more than I'd want to build Bailey bridges. All her talents and advantages are miles out of my reach. And so," she added, " miles out of the reach of my jealousy. Don't you want a drink ? "

" Not yet," he said. " Isn't that just rationalization because Leland's in love with her ? Did you always feel that way ? "

" Since the first day we met her. Which was incidentally the day he fell in love with her—so your argument can't be proved or disproved."

She went back in her mind to that day ; Mark Lewis's party given for his sister who had come back to America after living six years in England. She recalled that she had made Leland late for the party, sitting too long over her typewriter, then changing her dress three times. He was in a state of jangled irritation and the third dress was no better than the first choice and all the women at Lewis's party were dazzlers. But they all dimmed when you looked at Jane. That first snapshot lingered in memory ; the tall head over the crowd the lion-coloured hair, the broad forehead and

golden-brown eyes; the sculpture of the bones and the smile.

"She has something," Viola said, "that professional beauties don't have as a rule; warmth and friendliness."

"Why not?" said Ralph. "With a five-figure income and her social background, anybody'd be warm and friendly."

"Stop," Viola said, "I hate everybody's implication that Leland's marrying her to better himself."

Ralph made grumbling and indignant noises.

Viola chewed grass instead of her finger.

"You see," she said, "Jane's assets—her money and her *cordon bleu* and her talent for running a house or a career—seem to me incidental. The true answer to Jane is that she's a devastator; and it wouldn't matter how little money she had or how little background, she'd still devastate."

"I assume," said Ralph, "that somewhere beyond the divorce courts there's a Mr. Berisford, duly devastated."

"Her husband," said Jane, "was killed playing polo in England. She saw it happen. And now I'll get you your drink."

"Because," she thought, "I can't go on talking like Jane's best press-agent; without sounding insincere. Truth *will* sound like a lie, that's its trouble. And the truth is that I can't resent Jane any more than I can resent weather . . . She's just *there*, like weather. Would it be any nicer if I could be angry—instead of resigned and alone, with my heart that's cracked down the middle? It couldn't hurt more, could it, than this sad silence going on and on?"

Relieved to be alone, she lingered, mixing the drinks. The room was beginning to lose the echo, the traces of Leland. Across the long windows, she had set her own desk, now in a fine state of disorder. On his desk there lay magazines, still unopened, cylindrical in their wrappers: parcels of review-copies; unpaid bills clipped together; the small white radio and a pair of gardening gloves. *Is he back yet? No . . . I'd know if he were back,*

She turned up the radio.

"This afternoon, search-parties patrolling over stretches of Newfoundland forest have reported sighting wreckage of the missing Transatlantic liner strewn over a hillside. It is unlikely that there are any survivors among the forty-eight persons on board."

Slowly Viola's hand separated two cubes of ice that had stuck together and dropped them into Ralph's drink. She heard the words going on and ceased to hear them.

She heard her own voice talking aloud: "Why should he be on that plane . . .? You don't even know what day he's coming back."

She looked at the room, at the litter of her own possessions obscuring the traces of Leland.

"It would happen," said the mathematical certainty in her mind. "It would happen. Just as he was happy; on his way to all the things I couldn't give him. Oh, Leland, I'm sorry; sorry I didn't make it nicer for you."

The racing film of memory began to unwind; with cruel lack of taste it showed her the first stove that they had bought together; square white symbol of failure. She saw their two-roomed flat in the heat wave: Leland hammering out his unfinished novel on the typewriter; the young keen blade of a profile and the wild dark hair.

She saw the profile change, become saddened and wary. She saw all the backgrounds afterwards, flawed by her own dreaming selfishness. So certain had she been that their love, their meeting-place of laughter, was enough for him as for her; that it didn't matter—oh, damn the pictures in memory—about ordering the things that he liked; about keeping accurate accounts; about punctual hours or smooth-running domestic machinery. The film had a sound-track now. It recorded his patient voice:—
"But I *told* you, darling . . . oh, well never mind."

"Oh, *please* don't let him be dead." Her voice choked on the prayer.

The sound of a car stopping in the road was just what she expected to hear: some messenger bringing the bad news. She went out to the door. She saw Mark Lewis sitting at the wheel of his blue roadster and ran down to meet him. Yes, his face wore the authentic look of the messenger.

When Mark looked at the two envelopes, addressed in Leland's handwriting, he decided that he would deliver Jane's in person and mail Viola's from the local post-office. Jane was the first to defeat his project. "Darling: it's lovely to hear you but I can't see you. As soon as I knew Leland was delayed, I made a date with Geraldine Kirsch; you know she's doing over the apartment and there's awfully little time; poor Leland, bless him, drop his letter with the doorman, darling . . . Did he tell you Viola was going to Reno this week? . . . Bless you Mark; see you tomorrow, maybe. Sorry; so many things."

The warm, exciting voice shut off; the telephone clicked, and Mark was disappointed because he subscribed to the majority view in adoring his sister Jane.

He left the note at the door and drove out to the country. He was still sleepy after the flight. When he took the road that looped past Leland's property, he remembered that he hadn't mailed Viola's letter. Here was the white house with the blue shutters and the pool of green lawn before it. Could he risk dropping

it into the letterbox without Viola's seeing him ? Last time he saw her she had been friendly enough, but now, with the divorce well and truly on the way, a meeting would be awkward.

He braked the car ; he hesitated, looking towards the windows. At that moment she came running out of the house and cut off all escape.

" Hullo, Viola," he said awkwardly. She looked terrible ; her face was white and her eyes red ; her hands made little jumping movements, clutching at his arm.

" Leland was in that plane, wasn't he ? That's what you've come to tell me. I just heard it on the air."

" Heard what, Viola ? "

" The plane that crashed in Newfoundland."

(" Poor darling," he thought. " This, on top of everything else. Tough.") He said, " No, no, no, he wasn't. I heard that report earlier on my way down. It was a chartered plane. Leland's flying Maritime Airways."

He saw her waver and shut her eyes.

" I promise—" he said. " I saw him at Gander when I came through this morning. He was held up. He gave me this for you."

Still she trembled. " Mark, you're *sure* ? "

" Positive. He's on Maritime, Flight 222. He'll be in late tonight." Her look of dazed joy was worse than anything—he wanted to get away. He said, " You're all right, are you, my dear ? I have to get home."

" But of course I'm all right," she said. " Thank you, Mark." She took the letter and turned towards the house.

Mark's car drove off. Viola stood on the path opening the letter. Still dazed with the relief of being able to think of a Leland who was still alive, she said to herself, " Not very tactful of him to send this to me by Mark ; his future brother-in-law. One of his sleepier moments . . . Now don't let your fingers shake. This will be just more stuff about the divorce."

She unfolded the letter and read.

Beloved,

Here I sit, tethered in Gander, straining towards you in my heart, talking to you because I can't not *talk to you . . .*

" This room," said Jane Berisford, standing between the tall vase of lilies and the blue alcove, " is to be a library for Leland. Nobody wants a dining-room this size in a modern apartment. Bookshelves along these three walls ; here are the measurements. The desk will go there."

Geraldine Kirsch stood, her little dark face thrust rapturously

forward, admiring Jane. She had been admiring Jane for years and Jane had told her more than once that a stream of compliment could be just as tiring as a stream of abuse. So she held her tongue and nodded and made notes. She was, for all her spaniel-like devotion, an efficient young woman. Jane, efficiency's worshipper, would not otherwise be employing her on this job.

"The important thing," said Jane, "is that Leland should have somewhere to write." She smiled her astonishingly charitable smile: "My future husband, in case you don't know, isn't a publisher at all. He's a novelist. Let's have a drink, shall we?" In her decorative, graceful fashion she moved across and took up the crystal shaker.

"You mean," Geraldine said, "that he's always wanted to be a novelist?"

"Darling, it's what he's going to be. Because it's what he is. Naturally he could never get around to it with Viola playing up her creative talents to him all these years."

"He looks like a writer," Geraldine said, her eyes straying to the romantic profile in the leather frame.

"Of course he does. It sticks out all over him. Leland's an extraordinarily subtle psychologist; he's got the X-ray eye; and the sensitivity. More like a woman's sensitivity than a man's.

"That," said Jane with compassion, "is why he went through such miserable hell over breaking his marriage."

"He's kind."

"Much too kind. Too kind, incidentally, to make a successful business man."

"Do you want him to give up publishing altogether?"

"No, I don't," said Jane, "I want him to put in a really capable vice-chairman; I know exactly the right man; he'll organize Merrick Sloane so that Leland only needs to be there three days a week. He'll be *so* much happier."

"Leland," said Geraldine, "must be thanking God for you on his knees right now."

"Quite a trick, in an aeroplane. But—yes, I believe he is. Clear of the untidiness at last. Would you believe it, Gerry, up to the last evening Leland was prepared to leave it untidy? Even with the divorce agreed to; there he was with a brand new compromise. He must go on seeing her; meeting as friends. His kindness again . . ." She stroked her smooth forehead with her finger-tips. "So I had to be brave."

"You always are."

"*And* it was the night before he flew to Europe. Not easy. Not nice; telling the person you love what your terms are. It isn't bossy, is it, to see so clearly for someone else?"

"But—heavens, surely he must have known that you were right?"

"Oh, he did. He half-admitted that it was Viola's idea to go on meeting. In her gentle, incompetent way she probably thought that it would work. You know," Jane said, "that was the first time I ever staked a claim. I never tried to get him away from her, ever."

"You wouldn't have had to try very hard, surely."

"No . . ." Jane rose and re-filled their glasses. "I didn't knock that house down. It was in ruins already."

"Mind if I ask you something?" said Geraldine. "Why didn't you marry again before this?"

"I never found the right man. All the other candidates over-stressed the fact that I was their idea of a perfect wife. Nobody wants to be loved for her abilities."

"There," said Geraldine, "speaks the owner of an unfair share of abilities."

When Geraldine had gone, Jane looked at the clock. Only seven now; he would not be here till ten.

She was treasuring the note he had sent her by Mark; she hadn't wanted to read it in front of Geraldine. She took it out of her bag and put it on the table. She would save it up just a little longer. She went into the kitchen.

"I won't eat any dinner, Lucy; just make me a salad sandwich. I'll have some supper with Mr. French when he gets in. Let me look at it." It was perfect as it always was. Champagne; caviar and cold vichyssoise: the *entrecôte* that she would cook in the chafing-dish, with the sauce whose recipe she had learned in Monte Carlo; strawberries, a ripe Camembert; Napoleon brandy.

"I'm sorry," Lucy said, "you have to wait so long."

"Not so long now. I may go to a movie before I go to the airport. Goodnight, Lucy."

And now for the letter. She laid the smudged envelope against her cheek. She blew a kiss to his photograph. "Not so long now," she said again, making the words caress him with more than their immediate meaning: "Not so long now, my darling, till I can give you all the things you ought to have had long ago; till I can make you the person you were meant to be." She opened the envelope. She read:

My dear, I meant to write again last week, but London as usual filled itself with dates and dooms . . . Remember fighting your way through that manuscript in the heat-wave?

Time and date of our meeting chosen by you . . . . I'd like to

put on record . . . My wish to go on seeing you, hearing from you, talking to you . . . Could you send my shirts . . . My Chesterton, the collection that you gave me?

By the time she reached the postscript about a Mrs. Close in a hat like a meringue, her hands were shaking so much that the letter tore in half.

Leland French, searching among the faces as he came through the barrier at Idlewild, was not disappointed. He would rather, he told himself, find Jane at her apartment.

Tired, and with a sudden stillness in his mind, he blinked at the lights of Manhattan. He felt the speed of the taxi cut off these last moments of waiting; he gazed attentively at his future. Leaving his bags at the club, he kept the taxi and drove on to East 54th Street. He was whistling a tune as he came up in the elevator.

Jane opened the door to him. She stood there in silence; so did he, because the black dress made her so much more white and gold than he had remembered.

"Hullo," she said quietly, and no more.

"What is wrong, Jane?"

"You are, Leland."

He waited.

"You'd better come in; we have to talk. I hope I'm going to keep my temper, but I wouldn't bank on it if I were you. There are sandwiches and drinks . . . I imagine you dined on the plane."

"I'll have a drink," Leland said. He knew Jane too well to hurry her out of her own *tempo*. He filled his glass, watching her move to the table that held a torn letter on its polished surface. She pointed. "Mark brought me this. Will you look at it?"

He stood staring at the first lines of his letter to Viola.

"Not very efficient of you, was it?" Jane was saying. "I imagine that she'll be equally delighted to get mine."

"Do you?" he heard himself asking stupidly. "Now, do you?" And then, "You're very angry?"

"What do you expect me to be? My God, Leland, is that how you keep a promise?"

"I never promised you not to write to Viola."

"You promised to cut clear; didn't you?"

He was silent.

"But you couldn't," Jane said, "bring yourself to do it. And you never will. Divorce won't make any difference. Marriage to me won't make any difference. You'll go right on feeling guilty and sorry and looking back. You'll go on mussing up your life and mine, just because you're too weak to get free. You'll lie to me again. Did you write her from Europe every time you wrote me? Cute little

letters—the heat-wave, Mrs. Close, send my shirts, let's all be boys and girls together—and the hell with it. Well, don't stand there blinking like a doped monkey. Isn't it the truth ? "

" What," he said, " do you want me to do ? "

" I don't," said Jane, standing between the vase of lilies and the blue alcove, " want you to do anything. It's quite clear that whatever I ask won't have the slightest effect. I can't save you, because you don't want to be saved. You're content to be a mess. You've lived with her too long not to be a mess. And I don't want any part of it."

" Meaning," he said, " that you don't want to marry me ? "

" Meaning precisely that."

He put down his glass on the table.

" So," said Jane, " you can go back and have a glorious guilty reconciliation ; and sob over the shirts and the heat-wave and feel sacrificially purged for a week or two before you start running wild again. Nice for Viola. Yes, on second thoughts, it *will* be nice for Viola ; it's what she's used to. And, God help you, it's what you're used to. Where I was a fool was to think I could ever change it ; ever change you ; ever make you into a man."

The flash of anger warmed him. " That's enough, Jane, please."

" Go, will you," she said, with her back to him.

" Now ? "

" Now. And you might remember to warn the next lady that you've a habit of mixing up letters and getting them into the wrong envelopes. Otherwise she might think you an efficient Don Juan and that would be a pity."

Now there was nothing in Leland's mind but a stunned disbelief. He wasn't sure that any of this had happened. He said, " I'm sorry, Jane," and went.

He saw Viola looking at him from the other side of the fireplace ; still wonderingly ; still with the face of the clown in bewilderment. He smiled at her. He allowed himself to wonder when that look would fade ; whether she would ever again trust the future and trust him.

" Darling—" he began.

" Yes ? "

" No. Something I can't say yet." He looked about him. The neatness of the room touched his heart ; the fresh flowers and the order on her writing-desk. None of it would last, he knew.

In a little while, the room would have its usual look at the end of the day ; as though a hurricane had passed through it. Tomorrow, the wave would be out of her hair and he doubted whether she would ever again get the rouge in level patches on her cheek-

bones. He saw that he would again be irritated by these things—familiarly irritated and with an affectionate resignation.

"If that were all it was—" his thoughts began; her light hesitant voice interrupted the thoughts.

"One thing *I* have to say, Leland. I've been waiting because I thought you'd mention it first."

"Yes, love?"

"The letters you wrote from Gander—"

"Yes, love?"

"I don't want to know what happened when she got mine. It isn't my business. I just wanted you to know that I didn't read hers beyond the first two lines. I saw at once that it wasn't for me. So I just put it in another envelope and mailed it to her."

"Thank you, darling." After a pause, he said, "You would." He felt a sudden temptation to giggle. Lifting his eyes, he saw that Viola was on the verge of a giggle too.

"Leland—is this in bad taste? Don't answer if it is. But—letters in the wrong envelopes—the oldest story in the world. How did anyone as intelligent as you make a mistake like that?"

"*Mistake*? Who said it was a mistake?"

He saw her turn pale and he had to go on talking. "It's a bit hard," he said, "to have the only stroke of genius that ever came to me in my life written off as a mistake."

Her voice was a whisper: "What are you saying? What do you mean? You did it on *purpose*?"

"I mean, my love, that when I re-read those two letters at Gander, I realized that mine to you was the one thing that Jane wouldn't forgive. The one thing that would break it forever. And it had to break."

He saw the tears come up in the wide eyes of the clown and he went to take her in his arms.

His mind fled back to the moment of decision; to the dream when the light voice spoke in his ears, saying, "You can only save one of us, Leland, you know that," and—just before waking, he had known that the person whom he must save, the only person who mattered, was Viola and not Jane.

* * *

NO COMMENT

A club is a place where a few hundred Englishmen can be alone. The best literary, legal and political brains in the country assemble, sit down and remain silent on the burning questions of the day.

GEORGE MIKES, *Shakespeare and Myself*

HECATE!

How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

It is a custom in Ireland, when the young women would know if their lovers are faithful, to put three nuts upon the bars of the grate, naming the nuts after the lovers. If a nut cracks or jumps, the lover will prove unfaithful; if it begins to blaze or burn, he has a regard for the person making the trial.

If the nuts named after the girl and her lover burn together, they will be married.

JOHN BRAND, 1744–1806,
Observations on Popular Antiquities

Behind The Ghoulposts

The village lads unearthed a witch:
Her house, encircled by a ditch
Where dank miasmas twined and reached,
Like desert bones stood stark and bleached.

Black cats gnawed mice upon her stoops
While vultures hunched about in groups;
And in her window, flanked by brooms,
A notice read: "Housecreeping rooms!"

ROD MACLEAN

Black Magic

On the eve of St. George's Day, as well as on the night before Whitsunday, and on Midsummer Eve, witches go out naked in the dark and cut chips from the doors and gates of farmyards. These they boil in a milk-pail, and thus charm away the milk from the farms. Hence careful housewives examine their doors and smear mud in any fresh gashes they may find in them, which frustrates the knavish tricks of the milk-stealing witch.

Not to be baffled, however, the witches climb the wooden crosses by the wayside and chip splinters from them, or lay their hands on stray wooden wedges. These they stick into a post in the cattle-shed and squeeze them with their hands till milk flows from

them as freely as from the dugs of a cow. At this time also wicked people turn themselves by magic art into dogs and black cats, and in that disguise they suck the milk of cows, mares, and ewes, while they slaughter the bulls, horses, and rams.

W. R. S. RALSTON, 1828–1889, *Russian Folk Tales*

Mirror, Mirror

. . . ugly of cheer,
Her face all bowsy,
Wondrously wrinkled ;
Her een bleared,
And she gray-haired.
Her kirtle Bristow-red
With cloths upon her head
That weigh a sow of lead . . .

JOHN SKELTON, *c.* 1460–1529

Bewitched

" Mrs. Martins is an old witch, gentlemen, that's what she is, and she charmed me, and I got no sleep for her for three nights, and one night, at half-past eleven o'clock, I got up because I could not sleep and went out, and found a walking-toad under a clod that had been dug up with a three-pronged fork. That is why I could not rest ; she is a bad old woman ; she put this toad there to charm me, and her daughter is just as bad, gentlemen . . . She went round this here walking-toad after she had buried it, and I could not rest by day or sleep by night till I found it."

Leigh Chronicle, April 19th, 1879

The Little Creature

Red blood out and black blood in,
My Nannie says I'm a child of sin.
How did I choose me my witchcraft kin ?
Know I as soon as dark's dreams begin
Snared is my heart in a nightmare's gin ;
Never from terror I out may win ;
So—dawn and dusk—I pine, peak, thin,
Scarcely beknowing t'other from which—
My great-grandam—She was a Witch.

WALTER DE LA MARE

A Matter Of Weight

One Susanah Hannokes, an elderly woman of Wingrove, near Aylesbury, was accused by her neighbour of bewitching her spinning wheel, so that she could not make it go round, and offered to make oath of it before a magistrate ; on which the husband, to justify his wife, insisted upon her being tried by the church Bible, and that the accuser should be present. Accordingly she was conducted to the Parish Church, where she was stripped of all her cloathes to her shift and undercoat, and weighed against the Bible ; when, to the no small mortification of her accuser, she outweighed it, and was honourably acquitted of the charge.

Gentleman's Magazine, 1759

In A Black Spring

Come, call your cat
and fortify your broom,
there's need to travel
and the word is haste,
they've made a continent
our dancing room
with fields unfurrowed
and old towns laid waste.

Where spires once stood
we'll leap the fallen stones,
kick weathercocks
down many a broken street,
and plant a harvest
of assorted bones
in gaping meadows
where once grew wheat.

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH

Anent Pins

An old superstition, anent pins, was that if you desired to bring about the death of an enemy, you should make a waxen image in his likeness and then stick pins around the heart. This was, of course, the practice adopted by witches towards those they wished to injure.

Ancient Superstition

DURGA'S TENTH ARM

How could it differ from the other nine?

by E. MACWHIRTER

ALWAYS when he came to the enamelling of his images, Kartick the potter put on his second pair of spectacles, hooking the gold arms with great deliberation above the steel ones already on his ears.

The steel-framed spectacles which he had acquired at the village bazaar rode tight and high on the bridge of his thin nose, but the gold pair, brought him by his son-in-law from Calcutta, rested a full inch lower down, and although they enhanced the natural anxiety of his expression they were not so much an aid to keener eyesight as a confirmation that the final stage of his work was at hand.

To the village, the appearance of the second pair of spectacles was as much an indication of the coming Puja as the waxing of the bright moon, and each morning as Kartick the potter passed on his way to Bijoy Bannerjee's house where he was preparing the largest Durga image the village had ever known, eyes peered, heads turned and necks craned from shops and doors and gateways in an endeavour to ascertain whether the gold-spectacled stage had yet been reached.

And when the white grasses were silvering the river banks and the new leaf was red on the sal trees, when the wagtails had come back again and in another seven days the Puja moon would be showing itself in the sky and still the potter passed on his way each morning wearing only his steel-armed glasses, the village began to wonder.

And Kartick himself began to wonder too. Long before the last moon had waned, Bijoy Bannerjee's Durga image should have been finished, leaving the potter free to complete the smaller orders which stood only half-ready in the shed behind his house, for time was running short, and he was harried by all his clients who were clamouring ever more and more vociferously for his attentions. But still the giant image occupied his whole working day.

Every morning as soon as the sun was up and his cattle had been driven out to pasture, he would set off down the village street and on another mile through the greening paddy-fields until he

came to Bijoy Bannerjee's homestead. There in the dimness of the Puja hall he would light the wicks floating in the oil, his hand shaking a little as he held out the match, and wonder anxiously how it was with the model today.

As the light spread slowly across the golden thatch of the walls up to the grey corrugated tin roof, Kartick waited with downcast eyes, nerving himself to raise his head and confront his work. "Surely today," he told himself, "all will be well!" But as on all the other mornings even as he reassured himself with lowered eyes before the statue, he felt the shadows of disappointment waiting to engulf him.

He looked first at the head and was comforted by the majesty of his work, and from the head he turned to an inspection of the arms, considering each one critically as his eyes moved slowly from left to right: the muscles, the elbows, the wrists, the fingers of each were moulded to the greatest perfection he had ever achieved in his long image-making career. He approved them all with something of the pride and something of the humility of a mortal whose life-work it is to fashion the likeness of the Gods—approved them all, until his eyes rested on the tenth arm.

Ah! It was the clay again!

Today it had fallen from the palm of the hand leaving the framework exposed. Yesterday the small finger had fallen away, the day before the whole arm had sagged, and before that it had cracked from elbow to wrist so that the clay chipped as soon as he began to apply the chalk. Every day that he had come down to finish his work the tenth arm had resisted him.

And yet how could it differ from the other nine? In materials and construction and workmanship all had been treated alike. If the straw had been rotten all would have suffered, not only one arm. If the clay had been poor the image would have cracked and peeled all over, or softened and fallen away, not only on one arm. Certainly there could be nothing amiss with the making! What was it then that stood between his will to finish the image and its final achievement?

Had he enemies in the village who stole upon his masterpiece after dark? Were there evil small boys, perhaps, who took pleasure in wreaking nightly damage that they might enjoy the potter's consternation in the morning? But there were no mischievous eyes watching him from the shadows of the hall; and he had no enemies. What was it then that resisted him, that strove to prevent the straw and the clay and the chalk from assuming the shape of Durga?

He shivered a little as he stood before the Goddess, looking up at the clay eyes which already seemed to have endowed them-

selves with the secret of vision, and looked firmly back at him, looked coldly back at him.

He shook his head and turned away. He was imagining things! He was letting his anxiety about the tenth arm cloud his reasoning. Bad clay! That's what it was, bad clay. As for the eyes, the image could have no eyes until he painted them in, and he alone would choose the expression they should convey. But the blank eyes were still fixed on him as he turned to his work on the tenth arm again, and he seemed to feel their disapproval run over him and through him in a clamminess of cold sweat.

It was late when he came back through the village that evening, leaving the tenth arm fully rounded and the hand moulded to an even greater perfection than the other nine. Tomorrow, surely, all would be well tomorrow, and by Wednesday he would be able to wear his gold spectacles in honour of the enamelling.

He hurried along in the dusk. Already the lights were flickering in the small shops and the petrol lamp in the police outpost was flaring its brilliance across the muddied road. The cattle were coming home and they closed about him in a slow-moving, tail-swishing sea. He pushed his way through them and turned the corner by the post-office. In the shelter of the peepul tree old Anrup had already lit the first tobacco leaf of the evening, and the crowd was gathering about him to hear his nightly comment on the day's affairs. Hearing his name as he came quietly towards them, Kartick the potter paused in the shadows behind the tree to listen unseen to what was said.

"... so it is said."

"Then the image never will be finished?"

"It will never be finished!" The crowd muttered amongst themselves, and old Anrup lit his second *bidi*.

"But I have heard," said another voice from the distant edge of the crowd, "that it is not a question of a ghost at all. The women are saying that the wife of the potter has certain powers—there was the policeman's son and the husband of old Soni. It is said their sicknesses were sudden and very strange and both befell after the policeman intervened in the quarrel between Soni and the potter's wife about the cow and the maize-patch. True, old Soni was in the wrong of it and was made to pay compensation, but it was strange, was it not, that her husband and the policeman's son ...?"

"Everyone was saying at the time that the potter's wife must certainly have strange abilities."

"No! No!" said old Anrup impatiently. "That is foolish talk. There is no better woman in the village ..."

"It's not the woman," interrupted another voice, "it's the potter himself. They say that it is because he is unworthy that the image fails. His conscience is in some way heavy with guilt and this the Gods know."

"Perhaps he has stolen!"

"Oh, ho! Where did he get that gramophone that blares forth night and day? Where did he get that, I'd like to know?"

"I have thought lately he had an evasive air, almost a haunted look. He does not welcome friends or conversation when he is at his work, as once he used to do."

"He pretended not to hear me when I called to him from my gateway the other evening."

"He refused to bring his wife and daughter to my niece's wedding last week. He said he had no time. No time, mark you, for a wedding!"

"He's a very different man these last few weeks."

"Only one with some great sin, perhaps even murder, on his conscience, could be expected to change so strangely."

"It is nonsense you are all talking," old Anrup admonished them. "The potter has not changed. It is simply that he worries about the image."

"Ah! But where is his daughter? We no longer see her at the bazaar. Nor is she in the house. I know because . . ."

"That is even greater nonsense you are talking now. She has gone to her husband's parents. She went two months ago."

"All that way in the middle of the Rains? No girl would make such a journey alone. Where *is* the potter's daughter?"

"Yes, where is the potter's daughter?"

"What evil might not befall us if we worshipped at an image fashioned by hands that have murdered?"

"I will not listen to such wicked foolishnesses," said old Anrup heaving himself to his feet and shuffling off on his stick across the road. "Off to your homes, all of you!" he called to them sternly as he disappeared behind his gate. The crowd slowly melted away.

But Kartick still crouched in the shadows behind the tree. He did not hear the rain come lashing on the wind about the village, he did not feel the water rising about his feet, so concentrated were his thoughts on all he had overheard. He was dazed by their accusations. They were saying he was a thief! A murderer of his own child! That his wife was a witch! To what evil extent would not seemingly friendly tongues go when secure in their anonymity? That Raton his neighbour, the man he counted one of his dearest friends, should speak such evil of him. Pain and disillusionment mingled with his anger and the tears stung his

eyes. But what was he doing loitering here?

He must hurry! If the village were speaking thus tonight, what would they not be doing tomorrow? The image must be finished without further mishap. He would return at once to his work and keep a night-long watch over the tenth arm. If he were there to guard it through the hours of darkness surely no further damage could befall it!

Back through the village he hurried in the teeming rain, keeping to the deepest reaches of the shadows in the empty street. He was happier when he reached the rice-fields and could go splashing on unobserved to Bijoy Bannerjee's homestead.

It was pitch dark when he stole into the Puja hall; he groped his way towards the image, anxious to light the lamps and to see whether all was still well. But the matches in his pocket were sodden with rain: there could be no light: he must keep his vigil in the dark. Cautiously he felt for the figure, groping with outstretched hands until he touched its shoulder, and then his hands moved from arm to arm until they rested on the tenth one. He explored it from elbow to finger-tip—it was intact—he sighed with relief. Already, he could feel, the clay was hardening a little.

Surely if he watched over it all night, if he protected it himself, no evil could befall it. He edged closer to the image, crouching down below it, and gave himself up to awaiting the dawn, with his thoughts for company. With a mind so stricken and confused there was no temptation to sleep.

Could the women really have suggested that his wife was a witch? Could his friends really imagine he was a murderer? Round and round went the pattern of his argument now putting one interpretation, now another, on the gossip he had heard.

Outside, the heavy rain had passed on with the storm, and the drip from the eaves was the only sound in his darkened world. But what was that rustling in the thatch of the wall beside him? What was it that he sensed reaching out in the dark above his head? He waited, his heart hammering so noisily in his chest that surely its clamour reverberated as far away as the village!

"This," he urged himself, "is the minute for which you are waiting. This is the time for action!" But he only cowered closer to the ground. The rustling ceased, and silence was once more complete in the darkness of the hall before Kartick the potter could nerve himself to stretch up his hand. His fingers encountered a thin rope.

He felt it tentatively. It was smooth: it was old. His hand traced it hesitantly along until it disappeared through the thatch of the wall. He felt back along the rope again to discover that it ended in a knot slipped about the tenth arm of the image. His

fright chilled his skin with the coldness of his sweating. What evil was this that he had to contend with? Whence came this rope that only a few minutes before had no existence? His damp hands trembled uncontrollably as he sought to ease the knot and lift the rope free of the arm; he began to fear that in his new clumsiness he would himself damage the image.

But at last it was done. The tenth arm was freed without mishap and the rope lay harmless in his hands. As he pulled at it to see whence it came there rose up beyond the thatched wall at his elbow a long, startling and plaintive "Mea—a—aah!".

At dawn next morning when his rewarding vigil was ended and before he hurried off to his house, Kartick the potter aroused the widow Barua who lived on largess in a small lean-to hut adjoining the Puja hall in Bijoy Bannerjee's compound, and without giving her time to rub the sleep from her eyes, he administered a long and graphic reprimand on the subject of the tethering of goats.

It was only when he paused for indignant breath, and the widow managed to make herself heard, that his attitude was at all softened. The goat was, she pleaded, her last surviving possession from her married home; the milk and the kids it produced regularly gave her a modicum of independence; and as the old nanny was all she had left to love and to cherish, what was more reasonable than to ensure its safety at night by entrusting it to Durga's protection? She had only to thrust her hand with the tethering rope through the thatch wall, and there, as Kartick the potter had seen for himself, was the hand of Durga outstretched to help her.

It was useless for the potter to reason that the clay shape held no virtues until Durga herself had visited it; the widow Barua thought otherwise. It was only when he promised her a small Durga image for her own household, free of all the usual charges, that she was comforted and could be persuaded to make alternative tethering arrangements for her goat.

And later that same morning as he came hurrying down the village street at his usual time on his way to Bijoy Bannerjee's homestead, suspicious glances and hostile whispers gave place to Puja smiles, for Kartick the potter passed on his road wearing his second and gold-rimmed pair of spectacles.

* * *

MAL DE MER

When you have been bored for an hour or two on earth, it sometimes is a change to be bored for an hour or two on water.

BENJAMIN DISRAELI, *The Young Duke*

PASSING GRETNA GREEN

The odds were a thousand to one against Jidbell and her man

by JIM PHELAN

WHEN young Mouthpiece William first went courting Jidbell the Didicai, it was with his eyes open. He risked a kicking, and knew it.

Mouthpiece was a tramp, and the tramp who takes a tinker or didicai girl out on the road must be game to take a wicked beating if her people catch him. Mouthpiece was game.

Tall and dark, and good-looking in a wild way, hailing from somewhere near Inverness in the Scottish Highlands, Mouthpiece went padding the roads of southern England. That was to be near the didicai troop, waiting his chance to snatch Jidbell.

But a padding-tramp has no swift horses to make a romantic elopement, nor any fast car to speed with his bride, nor even a couple of bikes for a fairly quick getaway. The odds were a thousand to one against Jidbell and her man.

Jidbell was a slim, black-haired beauty, bronze-coloured from the sun and from her mother as well, with dark fine eyes and a lithe lovely body. Born on the road, living on it for all her twenty years, she knew how hard it would be to get away from her people.

For who can conceal tracks and signs, or even their very thoughts, from people who can tell whether three rabbits or five went into a burrow last Thursday? Of course the family knew Jidbell was all for going, and they watched her.

Then it came time to move the didicai camp. Seventeen miles it was, to the next pull-in for the caravans. At such a time the didicai travel the road separately, young and old begging their way for all the miles between stop and stop.

It was at such a time that Jidbell would go, and everyone knew it.

So the family gave her bloody warning, red warning, of what would happen to her if she ran away and was caught. Also they put Abbie, her elder sister, to travel the road with her, the seventeen miles.

Now Abbie hated the very heart-beat of Jidbell, hated her prettiness and her free independent ways. Envied her, too, because she would marry the tall pad-mumper, the handsome, laughing

young tramp of whom she had heard much, although she had never seen him. Abbie would be a good custodian.

Now the way the didicai girls go the road between stop and stop is this—they beg only from grown men, of prosperous appearance. Between stop and stop, the girls travel in badly-torn clothes, poor paltry flimsy rags barely held together by a few threads. They let a man see what a shame it is that their frocks are torn at the most embarrassing places. So they get money.

Because the men are sorry for their poverty, it would be.

Jidbell and Abbie met a few generous men on the road, and soon had about a pound in silver between them, and were in good humour enough. Except that Abbie watched her sister at every cross-roads, with the same mean, vindictive, gloating sneer as they passed each one.

It would have been easy for Jidbell to run away, up one of the mountain lanes to right or left. But what would have been the use, when Abbie would follow her? That would be after Abbie had left a road-sign, the twig-and-leaf signals of the didicai, bringing the whole troop in angry pursuit.

So Jidbell did not run away, and Abbie gloated more often. Ten miles had been covered out of the seventeen, when at last Abbie spoke out all the venomous mockery that was inside her.

"Five weeks we stay at the next stop," she mocked. "So there won't be any runaway marriages this month, after all your shaping and scraping. Now where's the lovely handsome big mumper that was going to snatch you, eh?"

Jidbell did not answer, and Abbie drew breath for another spiteful outburst. Then suddenly she relaxed, and spoke to her sister in the gentle placid murmur the girls used to one another for business purposes. They were approaching a prosperous-looking man.

Apparently a transport-manager, he stood by the roadside entering some particulars in a note-book, while he talked with a lorry-driver. As soon as the girls told of their poverty, and showed the deplorable condition of their frocks, he gave Abbie half a crown and asked her name.

She told him the first name that came into her head, and the man studied her a little more closely. Then he looked from one girl to the other.

"Look here," he inquired, "do you girls know a tramp fellow called Mouthpiece William?" Abbie shot a venomous glance at her sister.

"We know of him, sir," she told the man. "But he is nothing of ours—nor ever will be. If he has done any thievery—"

"No, no, no," laughed the stranger. "It is just a wee job I want him to do. Can you read?"

"No, sir," said Abbie, and Jidbell also shook her head.

"I don't think he can either," the man said musingly. "But he might be able to—" He stooped and scribbled a note. "The next cross-roads, I think," he told Abbie. "Give him that if you meet him."

Abbie took the note, and shuffled her feet, and looked stupid, until the man laughed out loud, and scribbled another line.

"There you are," he told her. "You get another half-crown when the note's delivered—not before." At that Abbie brightened up, and started down the road, talking to Jidbell over her shoulder.

"One word," she threatened. "One word from you when we meet this William rat and I'll have you flogged with nettles tonight. You hear me." Jidbell said nothing, and at the next cross-roads, sure enough, a tall young tramp stood waiting.

Now Abbie watched Jidbell more closely than ever, not letting her swop even one word with the tramp. While she herself joked and flirted with the pad-mumper, after he had given her the half-crown, she saw that Jidbell stood silent and aloof, looking at the ground.

Presently Jidbell appeared to be almost forgotten, while Abbie and the tramp talked swiftly and in low tones, with many a squawking, giggling protest from Abbie as the pad-mumper urged something. At last, Abbie turned to her sister.

"Get on your road," she ordered, and her eyes were shining, with exultation and other things. "You can run away if you like—and if you're mad," she added. "I'll catch you up in a mile or so—me and Mouthpiece has some business to talk over, up the mountain lane here."

Dejected-looking, with her eyes on the ground, Jidbell shuffled down the main road. Abbie turned away up the lane with the tramp.

Two hundred yards Jidbell went on the highway, then doubled swiftly back, sneaking and peeping from the corner of the lane, until Abbie and the tramp had gone round the first bend. Then hastily she collected twigs and leaves, and made for the centre of the cross-roads.

Working fast, she laid a didicai road-sign, the message of twigs and leaves, telling that Jidbell had gone with Mouthpiece William, and pointing the way up the mountain lane.

Then she hid in a field, and watched, until the didicai men came along the road. First one and then another, then the three caravans with all the rest of the troop, halted at the cross-roads when they read the sign.

They shouted and quarrelled for a minute, and then the caravans swung into the lane, the men making ready for pursuit of Jidbell and Mouthpiece. While inside the hedge Jidbell was sneaking in the opposite direction, parallel with the main road, back the way she had come.

Up the mountain lane, Abbie and the laughing young tramp had found a grassy dingle, and Abbie was laughing at the pad-mumper's urging. Then she squawked and giggled as the tramp gripped her. In three swift grabs he tore the tattered rags from her, until she stood up in only her shoes. Even then Abbie laughed, at the roughness of his love-making. Because, of course, her clothes were worthless, and could be mended in five minutes.

But she did not laugh when the tramp strode swiftly up the lane, away from the cross-roads, carrying the clothes with him. In less than a minute Abbie was left screeching in the lane, with nothing but the shoes on her feet and the note in her hand.

There the men of the troop found her, when they came rushing murder-mad in search of Mouthpiece William. They stared at the naked girl, and while they stared Jidbell was out on the main road, racing back towards the lorry she and Abbie had passed.

The driver was at his wheel, and the prosperous-looking young man sat beside him, holding the door open for Jidbell. From the mountain lane there was a roar of rage, as the didicai saw Jidbell running for the lorry. Turmoil and vain swearing wasted minutes at the cross-roads, while a child who could read was fetched. Then the message was spelt out, word by word.

"Give her half a crown and kid to her," the message ran. "Anything to turn her and the mob off the main road. Strip the bitch pelt-naked so she can't follow. The lorry-driver is giving me and Jidbell a lift to Inverness.. See you up there next year. Mouthpiece William."

Swearing, with their coshes ready, the fiercest of the didicai rushed up the road. But the lorry had gone. And Inverness was six hundred miles away.

* * *

SELF-PROPELLED?

Two drunks got on a double-decker bus. One drunk insisted on going upstairs, but he soon came staggering down again, white as a sheet. His friend asked him what was wrong.

The first drunk replied, "Don't ever go upstairs. There's no driver."

★*Blackbeard (for so Captain Thatch was generally called) first "went a-pyrating at the latter end of the Year 1716" says Captain Charles Johnson in his "History of the Robberies and Murders of the most Notorious Pyrates, 1724." Fourteen wives he had, and a great beard that frightened America. He scratched in his journal, "Rum all out—Rogues a-plotting!" and weighing anchor, hoisted his Black Colours.*

ROGUES A-PLOTTING

by CHARLES JOHNSON

PLUTARCH, and other grave Historians, have taken Notice, that several great Men amongst the *Romans*, took their Sir-Names from certain odd Marks in their Countenances; as *Cicero*, from a Mark or Vetch on his Nose; so our Heroe, Captain *Thatch*, assumed the Cognomen of *Black-beard*, from that large Quantity of Hair, which like a frightful Meteor, covered his whole Face, and frightn'd *America*, more than any Comet that has appear'd there a long Time.

This Beard was black, which he suffered to grow of an extravagant Length; as to Breadth, it came up to his Eyes; he was accustomed to twist it with Ribbons, in small Tails, after the Manner of our Ramellies Wigs, and turn them about his Ears. In Time of Action, he wore a Sling over his Shoulders, with three brace of Pistols, hanging on Holsters like Bandaliers; he wore a Fur-Cap, and stuck a lighted Match on each Side, under it, which appearing on each side his Face, his Eyes naturally looking Fierce and Wild, made him altogether such a Figure, that Imagination cannot form an Idea of a Fury, from Hell, to look more frightful.

If he had the look of a Fury, his Humours and Passions were suitable to it; we shall relate two or three of his Extravagancies, by which it will appear, to what a pitch of Wickedness human Nature may arrive, if it's Passions are not check'd.

The Night before he was kill'd, he set up and drank the whole Night, with some of his own Men, and the Master of a Merchant-Man, and having had Intelligence of two Sloops coming to attack him, one of his Men ask'd him, in Case any thing should happen to him in the Engagement, with the Sloops, whether his Wife knew where he had buried his Money? He answered, *That no Body but himself, and the Devil, knew where it was, and the longest Liver should take all.*

Those of his Crew who were taken alive, told a Story which may appear a little incredible; however, we think it will not be fair to omit it, since we had it from their own Mouths. That once upon a Cruise, they found out that they had a Man on Board more than their Crew; such a one was seen several Days amongst them, sometimes below, and sometimes upon Deck, yet no Man in the Ship could give an Account who he was, or from whence he came; but that he disappeared a little before they were cast away in their great Ship; but, it seems, they all verily believed it was the Devil . . .

Capt. *Thatch*, alias *Black-beard*, pass'd three or four Months in the River, sometimes lying at Anchor in the Coves, at other Times, sailing from one Inlet to another, trading with such Sloops as he met, for all Things he wanted, whether Provisions, or Stores, and giving them something else in Exchange,—that is, when he happened to be in a giving Humour; at other Times he made bold with them, and took what he liked, without saying, *by your Leave*, knowing well they dare not send him in a Bill for the Payment.

He often diverted himself with going ashore among the Planters, where he revell'd Night and Day: By these he was well received, but whether out of Love or Fear, I cannot say; sometimes he used them courteously enough, and made them Presents of Rum, and Sugar, in Recompence of what he took from them; but, as for Liberties, (which 'tis said) he and his Companions often took with the Wives and Daughters of the Planters, I can not take upon me to say, whether he paid them *ad Valorem*, or no.

At other Times he carried it in a lordly Manner towards them, and would lay some of them under Contribution; nay, he often proceeded to bully the Governor, not, that I can discover the least cause of Quarrel betwixt them, but it seem'd only to be done, to shew he dare do it.

The Sloops trading up and down this River, being so frequently pillaged by *Black-beard*, consulted with the Traders, and some of the best of the Planters, what Course to take; they saw plainly it would be in vain to make any Application to the Governor of *North-Carolina*, to whom it properly belonged, to find some Redress; so that if they could not be relieved from some other Quarter, *Black-beard* would be like to Reign with Impunity; therefore, with as much Secrecy as possible, they sent a Deputation to *Virginia*, to lay the Affair before the Governor of that Colony, and to solicit an armed Force, from the Men of War lying there to take this Pyrate.

The Governor consulted with the Captains of the two Men of

War, *viz. the Pearl*, and *Lime*, who had lain in *St. James's River*, about ten Months. It was agreed, that the Governor should hire a couple of small Sloops, and the Men of War should Man them; this was accordingly done, and the Command of them given to Mr. *Robert Maynard*, first Lieutenant of the *Pearl*, an experienced Officer, and a Gentleman of great Bravery and Resolution, as will appear by his gallant Behaviour in this Expedition. The Sloops were well mann'd, and furnish'd with Ammunition and small Arms, but had no Guns mounted.

The 17th of *November*, 1718, the Lieutenant sail'd from *Kicquetan*, in *James River* in *Virginia*, and the 21st in the Evening, came to the Mouth of *Okerecock* Inlet, where he got sight of the Pyrate.

This Expedition was made with all imaginable Secrecy, and the Officer manag'd with all the Prudence that was necessary, stopping all Boats and Vessels he met with, in the River, from going up, and thereby preventing any Intelligence from reaching *Black-beard*, and receiving at the same an Account from them all, of the Place where the Pyrate was lurking; but notwithstanding this Caution, *Black-beard* had Information of the Design, from his Excellency of the Province; and his Secretary, Mr. *Knight*, wrote him a Letter, particularly concerning it, intimating, *that he had sent him four of his Men, which were all he could meet with, in or about Town, and so bid him be upon his Guard.* These Men belonged to *Black-beard*, and were sent from *Bath-Town*, to *Okerecock*, where the Sloop lay, which is about 20 Leagues.

Black-beard had heard several Reports, which happened not to be true, and so gave the less Credit to this, nor was he convinced till he saw the Sloops: Thereupon he put his Vessel in a Posture of Defence; he had no more than Twenty five Men on Board, tho' he gave out to all the Vessels he spoke with, he had 40. When he had prepared for Battle, he set down and spent the Night in drinking with the Master of a trading Sloop, who, 'twas thought, had more Business with *Thatch*, than he should have had.

Lieutenant *Maynard* came to an Anchor, for the Place being shoal, and the Channel intricate, there was no getting in, where *Thatch* lay, that Night; but in the Morning he weigh'd, and sent his Boat a Head of the Sloops, to sound, and coming within Gun-Shot of the Pyrate, received his Fire; whereupon *Maynard* hoisted the King's Colours, and stood directly towards him, with the best Way that his Sails and Oars could make.

Black-beard cut his Cable, and endeavoured to make a running Fight, keeping a continual Fire at his Enemies, with his Guns. Mr. *Maynard* not having any, kept a constant Fire with small Arms, while some of his Men laboured at their Oars; *Black-beard's*

Sloop ran aground, and Mr. *Maynard's* drawing more Water than that of the Pyrate, he could not come near him, so he anchored within half Gun-Shot of the Enemy; and, in order to lighten his Vessel, that he might run him aboard, the Lieutenant ordered all his Ballast to be thrown over-Board, and all the Water to be staved and then weigh'd and stood for him; upon which *Black-beard* hail'd him in his rude Manner: *Damn you for Villains, who are you? And, from whence came you?*

The Lieutenant made him Answer, *You may see by our Colours, we are no Pyrates. Black-beard* bid him send his Boat on Board, that he might see who he was; but Mr. *Maynard* reply'd thus; *I cannot spare my Boat, but I will come aboard of you, as soon as I can, with my Sloop.*

Upon this, *Black-beard* took a Glass of Liquor, and drank to him with these Words: *Damnation seize my Soul if I give you Quarters, or take any from you.* In Answer to which, Mr. *Maynard* told him, that *he expected no Quarters from him, nor should he give him any.*

By this Time *Black-beard's* Sloop fleeted, as Mr. *Maynard's* Sloops were rowing towards him, which being not above a Foot high in the Wast, and consequently the Men all exposed, as they came near together (there being hitherto, little or no Execution done, on either Side) the Pyrate fired a Broadside, charged with all manner of small Shot. A fatal Stroke to them! The Sloop the Lieutenant was in, having twenty Men kill'd and wounded, and the other Sloop nine: This could not be help'd, for their being no Wind, they were oblig'd to keep to their Oars, otherwise the Pyrate would have got away from him, which, it seems, the Lieutenant was resolute to prevent.

After this unlucky Blow, *Black-beard's* Sloop fell Broadside to the Shore; Mr. *Maynard's* other Sloop, which was call'd the *Ranger*, fell a-stern, being for the present disabled, so the Lieutenant finding his own Sloop had Way, and would soon be on Board of *Thatch*, he ordered all his Men down, for fear of another Broadside, which must have been their Destruction, and the loss of their Expedition. Mr. *Maynard* was the only Person that kept the Deck, except the Man at the Helm, whom he directed to lye down snug; and the Men in the Hold were ordered to get their Pistols and their Swords ready for close fighting, and to come up at his Command; in order to which, two Ladders were placed in the Hatch-Way for the more Expedition.

When the Lieutenant's Sloop boarded the other, Captain *Thatch's* Men threw in several new fashion'd sort of Grenadoes, viz. Case-Bottles filled with Powder, and small Shot, Slugs, and

Pieces of Lead or Iron, with a quick Match in the Mouth of it, which being lighted without side, presently runs into the Bottle to the Powder, and as it is instantly thrown on Board, generally does great Execution, besides putting all the Crew into a Confusion; but by good Providence, they had not that Effect here; the Men being in the Hold, and *Black-beard* seeing few or no Hands aboard, told his Men, that *they were all knock'd on the Head, except three or four and therefore*, says he, *let's jump on Board and cut them to Pieces.*

Whereupon, under the Smoak of one of the Bottles just mentioned, *Black-beard* enters with fourteen Men, over the Bows of *Maynard's* Sloop, and were not seen by him, till the Air clear'd; however, he just then gave a Signal to his Men, who all rose in an Instant, and attack'd the Pyrates with as much Bravery as ever was done upon such an Occasion.

Black-beard and the Lieutenant fired the first Pistol at each other, by which the Pyrate received a Wound, and then engaged with Swords, till the Lieutenant's unluckily broke, and stepping back to cock a Pistol, *Black-beard*, with his Cutlash, was striking at that Instant, that one of *Maynard's* Men gave him a terrible Wound in the Neck and Throat, by which the Lieutenant came off with a small Cut over his Fingers.

They were now closely and warmly engaged, the Lieutenant and twelve Men, against *Black-beard* and fourteen, till the Blood run out of the Scuppers in Streams; *Black-beard* received a Shot into his Body, from the Pistol that Lieutenant *Maynard* cock'd, yet still stood his Ground and fought with great Fury, till he received sixteen Wounds, and five of them by Shot.

At length, as he was cocking another Pistol, having fir'd several before, he fell down dead; by which Time, eight more out of the fourteen dropt, and all the rest much wounded, jump'd over-board and call'd out for Quarters; which was granted, tho' it was only prolonging their Lives for a few Days. The Sloop *Ranger* came up, and attack'd the Men that remain'd in *Black-beard's* Sloop with equal Bravery, till they likewise cry'd for Quarters.

Here was an End of that couragious Brute, who might have pass'd in the World for a Heroe, had he been employ'd in a good Cause.

* * *

SALVAGE DRIVE?

A housewife, cleaning her upstairs windows, leaned out too far and fell, landing squarely in a dust-bin. A passing Chinese gentleman commented: "Englishmen velly wasteful. Woman good for ten years yet."

EVER SINCE ADAM

The sins they sinned in Eden, boys,
Are bad enough for me

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

"Now," Elias said, "if only I didn't have to go home to my lousy wife. I married her in 1929. A lot of things've changed since 1929." He sighed. "What's a woman?" he asked. "A woman is a trap."

"You shoulda seen what I seen today," Palangio said. "My third fare. On Eastern Parkway. I watched her walk all th' way acrost Nostrand Avenue, while I was waitin' on the light. A hundred-and-thirty-pound girl. Blonde. Swingin' her hips like orchester music. With one of those little straw hats on top of her head, with the vegetables on it. You never saw nothin' like it. I held on to the wheel like I was drownin'. Talkin' about traps! She went to the St. George Hotel."

Elias shook his head. "The tragedy of my life," he said, "is I was married young."

"Two beers," Palangio said . . . "A guy met her in front of the St. George. A big fat guy. Smilin' like he just seen Santa Claus. A big fat guy. Some guys . . ."

"Some guys . . ." Elias mourned. "*I* gotta go home to Annie. She yells at me from six to twelve, regular . . ." He looked steadily at his beer for a moment and downed it. "I'm a man who married at the age a' eighteen."

"We need somethin' to drink," Palangio said.

"Buy us two whiskies," Elias said. "What the hell good is beer?"

IRWIN SHAW, *Mixed Company*

In Flagrante

A sinner and his neighbour's wife
Came to a guilty end of life,
For suddenly the roof fell in
And slew them in the act of sin.
Thus Fate was with stern judgment fraught; for
They're there for longer than they thought for.

Translated by DENIS TURNER,
from the Greek of Agathias Scholasticus

A Sorry Tale

I had a little Sorrow,
Born of a little Sin,
I found a room all damp with gloom
And shut us all within ;
And " Little Sorrow, weep," said I,
" And, Little Sin, pray God to die,
And I upon the floor will lie
And think how bad I've been ! "

Alas for pious planning—
It mattered not a whit !
As far as gloom went in that room,
The lamp might have been lit !
My Little Sorrow would not weep,
My Little Sin would go to sleep—
To save my soul I could not keep
My graceless mind on it !

So up I got in anger,
And took a book I had,
And put a ribbon on my hair
To please a passing lad.
And, " One thing there's no getting by—
I've been a wicked girl," said I ;
" But if I can't be sorry, why,
I might as well be glad ! "

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY,
A Few Figs from Thistles

All's Well . . .

This evening I observed my wife mighty dull and I myself was not mighty fond because of some hard words she did give me at noon out of jealousy of my being abroad this morning . . . At last about one o'clock she came to my side of the bed and drew my curtain open and with tongs red hot at the ends made as if she did design to pinch me with them at which in dismay I rose up and with a few words she laid them down and did little by little very sillily let all the discourse fall and about two, but with much seeming difficulty come to bed and there lay well all night long in bed talking together with much pleasure.

SAMUEL PEPYS, *Diary, January 12th*, 1669

The Uncertificated Line

"Is that young female your wife, young man?" said Mrs. Chikno.

"My wife?" said I.

"Yes, young man, your wife, your lawful certificated wife."

"No," said I, "she is not my wife."

"Then I will not visit with her," said Mrs. Chikno; "I countenance nothing in the roving line."

"What do you mean by the roving line?" I demanded.

"What do I mean by the roving line? Why . . . when ryes and rawnies lives together in dingles, without being certificated, I calls such behaviour being tolerably deep in the roving line, everything savouring of which I am determined not to sanctify. I have suffered too much by my own certificated husband's outbreaks in that line to afford anything of the kind the slightest shadow of countenance."

"It is hard that people may not live in dingles together without being suspected of doing wrong," said I.

"So it is," said Mrs. Petulengro, interposing; "and, to tell you the truth, I am altogether surprised at the illiberality of my sister's remarks . . . I am suspicious of nobody, not even of my own husband, whom some people would think I have a right to be suspicious of, seeing that on his account I once refused a lord . . ."

"Meklis," said Mrs. Chikno, "pray drop all that, sister . . . and with respect to that offer with which you frequently fatigue those who keeps company with you, I believe, after all, it was something in the roving and uncertificated line."

"In whatever line it was," said Mrs. Petulengro, "the offer was a good one. The young duke—for he was not only a lord, but a duke too—offered to keep me a fine carriage, and to make me his second wife; for it is true that he had another who was old and stout, though mighty rich, and highly good natured; so much so, indeed, that the young lord assured me that she would have no manner of objection to the arrangement; more especially if I would consent to live in the same house with her, being fond of young and cheerful society. So you see . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Chikno, "I see, what I before thought, that it was altogether in the uncertificated line."

GEORGE BORROW, *The Romany Rye*

A Word to the Wise

Make love in thy youth, and in old age attend to thy salvation.

VOLTAIRE

INVISIBLE WEAPON

One edge of her rose-brocaded gown was stained with blood

by CARTER DICKSON

"AFTER all," said our host, "it's Christmas. Why not let the skeleton out of the bag?"

"Or the cat out of the cupboard," said the historian, who likes to be precise even about clichés. "Are you serious?"

"Yes," said our host. "I want to know whether it's safe for anyone to sleep in that little room at the head of the stairs."

He had just bought the place. This party was in the nature of a house-warming; and I had already decided privately that the place needed one. It was a long, damp, high-windowed house, hidden behind a hill in Sussex. The drawing-room, where a group of us had gathered round the fire after dinner, was much too long and much too draughty. It had fine panelling—a rich brown where the firelight was always finding new gleams—and a hundred little reflections trembled down its length, as in so many small gloomy mirrors. But it remained draughty.

Of course, we all liked the house. It had the most modern of lighting and heating arrangements, though the plumbing sent ghostly noises and clanks far down into its interior whenever you turned on a tap. But the smell of the past was in it; and you could not get over the idea that somebody was following you about.

Now, at the host's flat mention of a certain possibility, the rest of us exchanged quizzical looks.

"But," said the historian's wife, rather shocked, "you never told us you had a ghost here!"

"I don't know that I have," replied our host quite seriously. "All I have is a bundle of evidence about something queer that once happened. It's all right! I haven't put anyone in that little room at the head of the stairs. So we can drop the discussion, if you'd rather."

"You know we can't," said the Inspector: who, as a matter of fact, is an Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. He smoked a large cigar, and contemplated ghosts with satisfaction. "This is exactly the time and place to hear about it. What is it?"

"It's rather in your line," our host told him slowly. Then

he looked at the historian. "And in yours, too. It's a historical story. I suppose you'd call it a historical romance."

"I probably should. What is the date?"

"The date is 1660."

"That's Charles the Second, isn't it, Will?" demanded the historian's wife; she annoys him sometimes by asking such questions. "I hope it has lots of big names in it. You know: Charles the Second and Buckingham and the rest of them."

The historian looked sceptically over his pince-nez.

"I warn you," he said, "if this is something you claim to have found in a drawer, in a crabbed old handwriting and all the rest of it, I'm going to be all over you professionally. Let me hear one anachronism—"

But he spoke without conviction. Our host was so serious that there was an uneasy silence in the group.

"No. I didn't find it in a drawer; the parson gave it to me. And the handwriting isn't particularly crabbed. I can't show it to you because it's being typed, but it's a diary; a great, hefty mass of stuff. Most of it is rather dull, though I'm steeped in the seventeenth century, and I confess I enjoy it. The diary was begun in the summer of '60—just after the Restoration—and goes on to the end of '64. It was kept by Everard Poynter, who owned Manfred Manor—that's six or seven miles from here—when it was a farm.

"I know that fellow," he added, looking thoughtfully at the fire. "I know about him and his sciatica and his views on mutton and politics. I know why he went up to London to dance on Oliver Cromwell's grave, and I can guess who stole the two sacks of malt out of his brewhouse while he was away.

"I see him as half a Hat; the old boy had a beaver hat he wore on his wedding-day, and I'll bet he wore it till his death. It's out of all this that I got the details about people. The actual facts I got from the report of the coroner's inquest, which the parson lent me."

"Hold on!" said the Inspector, sitting up straight. "Did this fellow Poynter see the ghost and die?"

"No, no. Nothing like that. But he was one of the witnesses. He saw a man hacked to death, with thirteen stab-wounds in his body from a hand that wasn't there and a weapon that didn't exist."

There was a silence.

"A murder?" asked the Inspector.

"A murder."

"Where?"

"In that little room at the head of the stairs. It used to be called the Withdrawing-Room."

Now, it is all very well to sit in your well-lighted flat in town and say we were hypnotized by an atmosphere. You can hear motor-cars crashing their gears, or curse somebody's wireless. You did not sit in that house, with a great wind rushing up off the Downs, and a wall of darkness built up for three miles around you : knowing that at a certain hour you would have to retire to your room and put out the light.

" I regret to say," went on our host, " that there are no great names. These people were no more concerned with the Court of Charles the Second—with one exception—than we are concerned with the Court of our own day. They lived in a little, busy, possibly ignorant world. They were fierce, fire-eating Royalists, most of them, who cut the Stewart arms over their chimney-pieces again, and only made a gala trip to town to see the regicides executed in October of '60. Poynter's diary is crowded with them. Among others there is Squire Radlow, who owned this house then and was a great friend of Poynter. There was Squire Radlow's wife, Martha, and his daughter, Mary.

" Mistress Mary Radlow was seventeen years old. She was not one of your fainting girls. Poynter—used to giving details—records that she was five feet tall, and thirty-two inches round the bust. ' Pretty and delicate,' Poynter says, with hazel eyes and a small mouth. But she could spin flax with any woman in the county ; she once drained a pint of wine at a draught, for a wager ; and she took eager pleasure in any good spectacle, like a bear-baiting or a hanging. I don't say that flippantly, but as a plain matter of fact. She was also fond of fine clothes, and danced well.

" In the summer of 1660 Mistress Mary was engaged to be married to Richard Oakley, of Rawndene. Nobody seems to have known much about Oakley. There are any number of references to him in the diary, but Poynter gives up trying to make him out.

" Oakley was older than the girl ; of genial disposition, though he wore his hair like a Puritan. He had a good estate at Rawndene, which he managed well, but his candle burned late over his books, for he was a great reader. He wandered abroad in all weathers, summer or frost, in as black a study as the Black Man.

" You might have thought that Mistress Mary would have preferred somebody livelier. But Oakley was good enough company, by all accounts, and he suited her exactly.

" And here is where the trouble enters. At the Restoration, Oakley was looking a little white. Not that his loyalty was exactly suspect ; but he had bought his estate under the Commonwealth. If sales made under the Commonwealth were now declared null and void by the new government, it meant ruin for Oakley ; and

also, under the business-like standards of the time, it meant the end of his prospective marriage to Mistress Mary.

"Then Gerald Vanning appeared.

"What a blaze he must have made! He was fresh from Versailles, from Cologne, from Bruges, from Brussels, from Breda, from everywhere that he had journeyed in the train of the formerly exiled king.

"Vanning was one of those 'confident young men' about whom we hear so much complaint from old-style Cavaliers in the early years of the Restoration. His family had been very powerful in Kent before the Civil Wars. Everybody knew he would be well rewarded, as he was.

"If this were a romance, I could now tell you how Mistress Mary fell in love with the handsome young Cavalier, and forgot about Oakley. But the truth seems to be that she never liked Vanning. Vanning disgusted Poynter by a habit of bowing and smirking every time he made a remark. It is probable that Mistress Mary understood him no better than Poynter did.

"There is a description in the diary of a dinner Squire Radlow gave to welcome him here at this house. Vanning came over in a coach, despite the appalling state of the roads, with a dozen lackeys in attendance. This helped to impress the Squire, though nothing had as yet been settled on him by the new régime.

"Vanning already wore his hair long, whereas the others were just growing theirs. They must have looked odd and patchy, like men beginning to grow beards, and rustic enough to amuse him.

"But Mistress Mary was there. Vanning took one look at her, clapped his hand on the back of a chair, bowed, rolled his eyes, and began to lay siege to her in the full-dress style of the French King taking a town. *Bons mots* slid from his tongue; he hiccupped; he strutted; he directed killing ogles.

"Squire Radlow and his wife were enraptured. They liked Oakley of Rawndene—but it was possible that Oakley might be penniless in a month. Whereas Vanning was to be heaped with preferments, a matter of which he made no secret. Throughout this dinner, Richard Oakley looked unhappy, and 'shifted his eyes.'

"When the men got drunk after dinner, Vanning spoke frankly to Squire Radlow. Oakley had staggered out to get some air under the apple trees; what between liquor and crowding misfortune, he did not feel well. Together among the fumes, Vanning and Squire Radlow shouted friendship at each other, and wept.

"Vanning swore he would never wed anyone but Mistress Mary, not if his soul rotted as deep in hell as Oliver Cromwell's. The Squire was stern, but not too stern. 'Sir,' said the Squire,

'you abuse my hospitality; my daughter is pledged to the gentleman who has just left us; but it may be that we must speak of this presently.' Poynter, though he saw the justice of the argument, went home disturbed.

"Now, Gerald Vanning was not a fool. I have seen his portrait, painted a few years later when periwigs came into fashion. It is a shiny, shrewd, razorish kind of a face. He had some genuine classical learning, and a smattering of scientific monkey-tricks, the new toy of the time. But, above all, he had foresight.

"In the first place, he was genuinely smitten with hazel eyes and other charms. In the second place, Mistress Mary Radlow was a catch. When awarding bounty to the faithful, doubtless the King and Edward Hyde would not forget Vanning of Mallingford; on the other hand, it was just possible that they might.

"During the next three weeks it was almost taken for granted that Vanning would eventually become the Squire's son-in-law. Nothing was said or done, of course. But Vanning dined a dozen times here, drank with the Squire, and gave to the Squire's wife a brooch once owned by Charles the First. Mistress Mary spoke of it furiously to Poynter.

"Then the unexpected news came.

"Oakley was safe in his house and lands. An Act had been passed to confirm all sales and leases of property since the Civil War. It meant that Oakley was once more the well-to-do prospective son-in-law, and the Squire could no longer object to his bargain.

"I have here an account of how this news was received at the manor. I did not get it from Poynter's diary. I got it from the records of the coroner's inquest. What astonishes us when we read these chronicles is the blunt directness, the violence, like a wind, or a pistol clapped to the head, with which people set about getting what they wanted. For, just two months afterwards, there was murder done."

Our host paused. The room was full of the reflections of firelight. He glanced at the ceiling; what we heard up there was merely the sound of a servant walking overhead.

"Vanning," he went on, "seems to have taken the fact quietly enough. He was here at the manor when Oakley arrived with the news. It was five or six o'clock in the afternoon. Mistress Mary, the Squire, the Squire's wife, and Vanning were sitting in the Withdrawing Room. This was (and is) the room at the head of the stairs—a little square place, with two 'panel' windows that would not open. It was furnished with chairs of oak and brocade; a needlework frame; a sideboard bearing a plate of oranges, a glass jug of water, and some glasses.

" There was only one candle burning, at some distance from Vanning, so that nobody had a good view of his face. He sat in his riding-coat, with his sword across his lap. When Oakley came in with the news, he was observed to put his hand on his sword; but afterwards he bowed in his finicking fashion and left without more words.

" The wedding had originally been set for the end of November; both Oakley and Mistress Mary still claimed this date. It was accepted with all the more cheerfulness by the Squire, since, in the intervening months, Vanning had not received any dazzling benefits. True, he had been awarded five hundred pounds a year by Parliament. But even so he was little better off than Richard Oakley; a bargain was a bargain, said the Squire, and Oakley was his own dear son.

" Nobody seems to know what Vanning did in the interim, except that he settled down quietly at Mallingford.

" But from this time curious rumours began to go about the countryside. They all centred on Richard Oakley. Poynter records some of them, at first evidently not even realizing their direction. They were as light as dandelion-clocks blown off, but they floated and settled.

" Who was Oakley? What did anybody know about him, except that he had come here and bought land under Cromwell? He had vast learning, and above a hundred books in his house; what need did he have of them? What had he been? A parson? A doctor of letters or physics? Or letters of a more unnatural kind? Why did he go for long walks in the wood, particularly after dusk?

" Oakley, if questioned, said that this was his nature. But an honest man, meaning an ordinary man, could understand no such nature. A wood was thick; you could not tell what might be in it after nightfall; an honest man preferred the tavern.

" Such whispers were all the more rapid-moving because of the troubled times. The broken bones of a revolution are not easily healed. Then there was the unnatural state of the weather. In winter there was no cold at all; the roads dusty; a swarm of flies; and the rose bushes full of leaves into the following January.

" Oakley heard none of the rumours, or pretended to hear none. It was Jamy Achen, a lad of weak mind and therefore afraid of nothing, who saw something following Richard Oakley through Gallows Copse. The boy said he had not got a good look at it, since the time was after dusk. But he heard it rustle behind the trees, peering out at intervals after Mr. Oakley. He said that it seemed human, but that he was not sure it was alive.

"On the night of Friday, 26th November, Gerald Vanning rode over to this house alone. It was seven o'clock, a late hour for the country. He was admitted to the lower hall by Kitts, the Squire's steward, and he asked for Mr. Oakley. Kitts told him that Mr. Oakley was above-stairs with Mistress Mary, and that the Squire was asleep over supper with Mr. Poynter.

"It is certain that Vanning was wearing no sword. Kitts held the candle high and looked at him narrowly, for he seemed on a wire of apprehension and kept glancing over his shoulder as he pulled off his gloves. He wore jack-boots, a riding-coat half-buttoned, a laced band at the neck, and a flat-crowned beaver hat with a gold band. Under his sharp nose there was a little edge of moustache, and he was sweating.

"'Mr. Oakley has brought a friend with him, I think,' says Vanning.

"'No, sir,' says Kitts, 'he is alone.'

"'But I am sure his friend has followed him,' says Vanning, again twitching his head about and looking over his shoulder. He also jumped as though something had touched him, and kept turning round and looking sharply into corners as though he were playing hide-and-seek.

"'Well!' says Mr. Vanning, with a whistle of breath through his nose. 'Take me to Mistress Mary. Stop! First fetch two or three brisk lads from the kitchen, and you shall go with me.'

"The steward was alarmed, and asked what was the matter. Vanning would not tell him, but instructed him to see that the servants carried cudgels and lights. Four of them went above-stairs. Vanning knocked at the door of the Withdrawing-Room, and was bidden to enter. The servants remained outside, and both the lights and cudgels trembled in their hands: later they did not know why.

"As the door opened and closed, Kitts caught a glimpse of Mistress Mary sitting by the table in the rose-brocaded dress she reserved usually for Sundays, and Oakley sitting on the edge of the table beside her. Both looked round as though surprised.

"Presently Kitts heard voices, but so low he could not make out what was said. The voices spoke more rapidly; then there was a sound of moving about. The next thing to which Kitts could testify was a noise as though a candlestick had been knocked over. There was a thud; a high-pitched kind of noise; muffled breathing sounds and a sort of thrashing on the floor, and Mistress Mary suddenly beginning to scream above it.

"Kitts and his three followers laid hold of the door, but someone had bolted it. They attacked the door in a way that roused the Squire in the dining-room below, but it held.

"Inside, after a silence, someone was heard to stumble, and grope towards the door. Squire Radlow and Mr. Poynter came running up the stairs just as the door was unbolted from inside.

"Mistress Mary was standing there, panting, with her eyes wide and staring. She was holding up one edge of her full skirt, where it was stained with blood as though someone had scoured and polished a weapon there. She cried to them to bring lights; and one of the servants held up a lantern in the doorway.

"Vanning was half-lying, half-crouching against the far wall, with a face like oiled paper as he turned his head to look at them. But they were looking at Oakley, or what was left of Oakley.

"He had fallen near the table, with the candle smashed beside him. They could not tell how many wounds there were in Oakley's neck and body; above a dozen Poynter thought, and he was right. Vanning stumbled over and tried to lift him up, but, of course, it was too late.

"Now listen to Poynter's own words:

"'Mr. Radlow ran to Mr. Vanning and laid hold of him, crying, "You are a murderer! You have murdered him!" Mr. Vanning cried to him: "By God and His mercy, I have not touched him! I have no sword or dagger by me!"' and indeed this was true. For he was flung down on the floor by this bloody work, and ordered to be searched, but not so much as a pin was there in his clothes.

"'I had observed by the nature of the wide, gaping wounds that some such blade as a broad knife had inflicted them, or the like. But what had done this was a puzzle, for every inch of the room did we search high, low and turnover; and still not so much as a pin in crack or crevice.

"'Mr. Vanning deposed that as he was speaking with Mr. Oakley, something struck out the light, and overthrew Mr. Oakley, and knelt on his chest. But who or what this was, or where it had gone when the light was brought, he could not say.'"

Bending close to the firelight, our host finished reading the notes from the sheet of paper in his hands. He folded up the paper, put it back in his pocket, and looked at us.

The historian's wife, who had drawn closer to her husband, shifted uneasily. "I wish you wouldn't tell us these things," she complained.

"But tell us, anyway. I still don't understand. What was the man killed with then?"

"That," said our host, lighting his pipe, "is the question. If you accept natural laws as governing this world, there wasn't any-

thing that could have killed him." We were all gazing at the ceiling. " Look here a moment ! " he said.

"The Squire begged Mistress Mary to tell him what had happened. First she began to whimper a little, and for the first time in her life she fainted. The Squire wanted to throw some water over her, but Vanning carried her downstairs and they forced brandy between her teeth. When she recovered she was a trifle wandering, with no story at all.

" Something had put out the light. There had been a sound like a fall and a scuffling. Then the noise of moving about, and the smell of blood in a close, confined room. Something seemed to be plucking or pulling at her skirts. She does not appear to have remembered anything more.

" Of course, Vanning was put under restraint, and a magistrate sent for. They gathered in this room, which was a good deal bleaker and barer than it is today ; but they pinned Vanning in the chimney corner of that fireplace. The Squire drew his sword and attempted to run Vanning through. But Poynter ordered two of the lads to hold the Squire back, quoting himself later as saying : ' This must be done in good order.'

" Now, what I want to impress on you is that these people were not fools. They had possibly a crude turn of thought and speech ; but they were used to dealing with realities. And here was a reality. Oakley's wounds were six inches deep and an inch wide, from a thick, flat blade that in places had cut to the bone. But there wasn't such a blade, and they knew it.

" Four men stood in the door and held lights while they searched for that knife (if there was such a thing) ; and they didn't find it. They pulled the room to pieces ; and they didn't find it.

" Nobody could have whisked it out, past the men on the door. The windows didn't open, being set into the wall like panels, so nobody could have got rid of a knife there. There was only one door, outside which the servants had been standing.

" Something had cut a man to pieces; yet it simply wasn't there.

" Vanning, pale but calmer, repeated his account. Questioned as to why he had come to the house that night, he answered that there had been a matter to settle with Oakley. Asked what it was, he said he had not liked the conditions in his own home for the past month, he would beg Mr. Oakley to mend them. He had done Mr. Oakley no harm, and therefore he would ask Mr. Oakley to call off his dogs. What dogs ? Vanning explained that he did not precisely mean dogs. He meant something that got into his bedroom cupboard at night ; and he had reasons for thinking Mr. Oakley had whistled it there. It had been there only since he had been paying attentions to Mistress Mary.

"These men were only human. Poynter ordered the steward to go up and search the little room again—and the steward wouldn't go.

"That little seed of terror had begun to grow like a mango tree under a cloth, and push up the cloth and stir out creeping tendrils of fear. It was easy to forget the broad, smiling face of Richard Oakley, and to remember the curious 'shifting' of his eyes. When you recalled that, after all, Oakley was twice Mistress Mary's age, you might begin to wonder just whom you had been entertaining at bread and meat.

"Even Squire Radlow did not care to go upstairs again in his own house. Vanning, sweating and squirming in the chimney corner, plucked up courage as a confident young man and volunteered to go. They let him. But no sooner had he got into the little room than the door clapped again and he came out running. It was touch-and-go whether they would desert the house in a body."

Again our host paused. In the silence it was the Inspector who spoke, examining his cigar and speaking with some scepticism. He had a common-sense voice, which restored reasonable values.

"Look here," he said. "Are you telling us local bogey-tales, or are you seriously putting this forward as evidence?"

"As evidence given at a coroner's inquest."

"Reliable evidence?"

"I believe so."

"I don't," returned the Inspector, drawing the air through a hollow tooth. "After all, I suppose we've got to admit that a man was murdered, since there was an inquest. But if he died of being hacked or slashed with thirteen wounds, some instrument made those wounds.

"What happened to that weapon? You say it wasn't in the room; but how do we know that? How do we know it wasn't hidden away somewhere, and they simply couldn't find it?"

"I think I can give you my word," said our host slowly, "that no weapon was hidden there."

"Then what the devil happened to it? A knife at least six inches in the blade, and an inch broad—"

"Yes. But the fact is, nobody could see it."

"It wasn't hidden anywhere, and yet nobody could see it?"

"That's right."

"An invisible weapon?"

"Yes," answered our host, with a curious shining in his eyes. "A quite literally invisible weapon."

"How do you know?" demanded his wife abruptly.

Hitherto she had taken no part in the conversation. But she

had been studying him in an odd way, sitting at his feet; and, as he hesitated, she rose at him in a glory of accusation.

"You villain!" she cried. "Unutterable villain! You've been making it all up! Just to make everybody afraid to go to bed, and because *I* didn't know anything about the place, you've been telling us a pack of lies—"

But he stopped her.

"No. If I had been making it up, I should have told you it was a story."

Again he hesitated. "I'll admit that I may have been trying to mystify you a bit. That's reasonable, because I honestly don't know the truth myself. I can make a guess at it, that's all. I can make a guess at how those wounds came there. But that isn't the real problem. That isn't what bothers me, don't you see?"

Here the historian intervened.

"A wide acquaintance with sensational fiction," he said, "gives me the line on which you're working. I submit that the victim was stabbed with an icicle, as in several tales I could mention. Afterwards the ice melted—and was, in consequence, an invisible weapon."

"No," said our host.

"I mean," he went on, "that's not feasible. You would hardly find an icicle in such unnaturally warm weather as they were having. And icicles are brittle: you wouldn't get a flat broad icicle of such steel-strength and sharpness that thirteen stabs could be made and the bone scraped in some of them. And an icicle isn't invisible. In the circumstances, this knife was invisible—despite its size."

"Nonsense!" said the historian's wife. "There isn't any such thing."

"There is if you come to think about it. Of course, it's only an idea of mine, and it may be all wrong. Also, as I say, it's not the real problem, though it's so closely associated with the real problem that—. But you haven't heard the rest of the story. Shall I conclude it?"

"By all means."

"I am afraid there are no great alarms or sensations," our host went on, "though the very name of Richard Oakley became a nightmare and kept people indoors after dark.

"'Oakley's friend' became a local synonym for anything that might get you if you didn't look sharp. One or two people saw him walking in the woods afterwards; his head was on one side and the stab-wounds were still there.

"A grand jury of Sussex gentlemen, headed by Sir Benedict Skene, completely exonerated Gerald Vanning. The coroner's

jury had already said 'persons or things unknown,' and added words of sympathy with Mistress Mary to the effect that she was luckily quit of a dangerous bargain. It may not surprise you to hear that eighteen months after Oakley's death she married Vanning.

"She was completely docile, though her old vivacity had gone. In those days young ladies did not remain spinsters through choice. She smiled, nodded, and made the proper responses, though it seems probable that she never got over what had happened.

"Matters became settled, even humdrum. Vanning waxed prosperous and respectable. His subsequent career I have had to look up in other sources, since Poynter's diary breaks off at the end of 1664. But a grateful government made him Sir Gerald Vanning, Bart.

"He became a leading member of the Royal Society, tinkering with the toys of science. His cheeks filled out, the slyness left his eyes, a periwig adorned his head, and four Flanders mares drew his coach to Gresham House.

"At home he often chose this house to live in when Squire Radlow died; he moved between here and Mallingford with the soberest grace. The little room, once such a cause of terror, he seldom visited; but its door was not locked.

"His wife saw to it that its flagstones were kept scrubbed, and every stick of wood shining. She was a good wife. He for his part was a good husband: he treated her well and drank only for his thirst, though she often pressed him to drink more than he did. It is at this pitch of domesticity that we get the record of another coroner's inquest.

"Vanning's throat was cut on the night of 5th October, '67.

"On an evening of high winds, he and his wife came here from Mallingford. He was in unusually good spirits, having just done a profitable piece of business. They had supper together, and Vanning drank a great deal. His wife kept him company at it. (Didn't I tell you she once drank off a pint of wine at a draught for a wager?) She said it would make him sleep soundly; for it seems to be true that he sometimes talked in his sleep.

"At eight o'clock, she tells us, she went up to bed, leaving him still at the table. At what time he went upstairs we do not know, and neither did the servants. Kitts, the steward, thought he heard him stumbling up that staircase out there at a very late hour. Kitts also thought he heard someone crying out, but a high October gale was blowing and he could not be sure.

"On the morning of 6th October, a cowherd named Coates was coming round the side of this house in a sodden daybreak

from which the storm had just cleared. He was on his way to the west meadow, and stopped to drink at a rain-water barrel under the eaves just below the little room at the head of the stairs. As he was about to drink, he noticed a curious colour in the water.

"Looking up to find out how it had come there, he saw Sir Gerald Vanning's face looking down at him in the shadow of the trees. Sir Gerald's head was sticking out of the window, and did not move; neither did the eyes. Some of the glass in the window was still intact, though his head had been run through it, and—"

It was at this point that the Inspector uttered an exclamation.

It was an exclamation of enlightenment. Our host looked at him with a certain grimness, and nodded.

"Yes," he said. "You know the truth now, don't you?"

"The truth?" repeated the historian's wife, almost screaming with perplexity. "The truth about what?"

"About the murder of Oakley," said our host. "About the trick Vanning used to murder Oakley seven years before.

"I'm fairly sure he did it," our host went on, nodding reflectively. "Nothing delighted the people of that time so much as tricks and gadgets of that very sort. A clock that ran by rolling bullets down an inclined plane; a diving-bell; a burglar-alarm; the Royal Society played with all of them. And Vanning (study his portrait one day) profited by the monkey-tricks he learned in exile. He invented an invisible knife."

"But see here—!" protested the historian.

"Of course he planned the whole thing against Oakley. Oakley was no more a necromancer than I am. All those rumours about him were started with a definite purpose by Vanning himself. A crop of whispers, a weak-minded lad to be bribed, the whole power of suggestion set going; and Vanning was ready for business.

"On the given night he rode over to this house, alone, with a certain kind of knife in his pocket. He made a great show of pretending he was chased by imaginary monsters, and he alarmed the steward. With the servants for witnesses, he went upstairs to see Oakley and Mistress Mary. He bolted the door. He spoke pleasantly to them.

"When he had managed to distract the girl's attention, he knocked out the light, tripped up Oakley, and set upon him with that certain kind of knife. There had to be many wounds and much blood, so he could later account for the blood on himself. The girl was too terrified in the dark to move. He had only to clean his knife on a soft but stiff-brocaded gown, and then put down the knife in full view. Nobody noticed it."

The historian blinked. "Admirable!" he said. "Nobody

noticed it, eh? Can you tell me the sort of blade that can be placed in full view without anybody noticing it?"

"Yes," said our host. "A blade made of ordinary glass, placed in the glass jug full of water standing on a sideboard table."

There was a silence.

"I told you about that glass water-jug. It was a familiar fixture. Nobody examines a transparent jug of water. Vanning could have made a glass knife with the crudest of cutting tools; and glass is murderous stuff—strong, flat, sharp-edged, and as sharp-pointed as you want to make it.

"There was only candle-light, remember. Any minute traces of blood that might be left on the glass knife would sink as sediment in the water while everybody looked straight at the weapon in the water and never noticed it. But Vanning (you also remember) prevented Squire Radlow from throwing water on the girl when she fainted. Instead, he carried her downstairs.

"Afterwards he told an admirable series of horror-tales; he found an excuse to go back to the room again alone, slip the knife into his sleeve, and get rid of it in the confusion."

The Inspector frowned thoughtfully. "But the real problem—" he said.

"Yes. If that was the way it was done, did the wife know? Vanning talked in his sleep, remember."

We looked at each other. The historian's wife, after a glance round, asked the question that was in our minds.

"And what was the verdict of *that* inquest?"

"Oh, that was simple," said our host. "Death by misadventure, from falling through a window while drunk and cutting his throat on the glass. Somebody observed that there were marks of heels on the board floor as though he might have been dragged there; but this wasn't insisted on.

"Mistress Mary lived on in complete happiness, and died at the ripe age of eighty-six, full of benevolence and sleep. These are natural explanations. Everything is natural. There's nothing wrong with that little room at the head of the stairs. It's been turned into a bedroom now; I assure you it's comfortable; and anyone who cares to sleep there is free to do so. But at the same time—"

"Quite," we said.

* * *

★ ***When you have read this copy of ARGOSY why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?***

A LINE FOR VENUS

"It's not on the map," he said, "—it's one of John McTurk's names"

by JOHN INGLIS HALL

DOLLY'S LUM, the Gadarene Wood, McTurk's Bay, Sheep Shallow, Lost Lovers' Seat—these and many other strange, expressive names I found attached to places on the banks of Loch Silloch as firmly as though time and custom had established them there over long centuries. On a cold, blustering day I took a boat to explore the loch with Dan McIntosh, the ghillie.

After we had fished two promising bays without success, he said, " I think we'll try Dolly's Lum the day. It's more sheltered."

He started up the outboard motor with a brisk pull of the rope, and soon we were nosing our way through the choppy waves which curl over the long, narrow expanse of the loch three-quarters of all the days in the year. Back to the wind, the blown, cold spray splashing on the back of my sou'wester hat, I looked at the large-scale map lying shielded on my knees. No trace of Dolly's Lum could I find, though all the bays, the woods, the strands and the lone hunting lodges were marked with good, serious Scots names, deriving from the surrounding mountains, valleys, corries and burns.

At last I looked up and said, " I can't find it, Dan. Where is it ? It isn't marked on the map."

" No, it wouldna be," he replied. " It's one of John McTurk's names."

In the days which followed, I discovered that there were no others : that all the names by which the physical beauties of the loch were known were " McTurk's names." Who then could prevent himself from wondering who was McTurk ? It is simple for a Napoleon, a Khan or a conqueror who overcomes a city or a country to rechristen it in blood. It it simple for a Columbus to rename what he finds on the other side of a far sea after a perilous voyage. But for one of the ordinary sons of men who have neither conquered cities nor dared the unknown to take possession of a lake, in our own times, and rename every surrounding wood and shelving deep—this surely is the stuff of greatness. Such things, I told myself, do not happen unless, behind them, lies some singular power.

At first I tried to prise the tale out of Dan McIntosh, but it was

as though he had the secret, if there was one, locked within him and withheld the key. I was without the tools necessary to pick the lock —long acquaintance and being of his people. He volunteered nothing about McTurk and did not reply to my questions, so I learned from him only two things—the fact that McTurk had actually existed; and McTurk's names, which he revealed to me daily, one by one, as we penetrated farther and farther along the broad, crystalline valley of the loch, deep in its own cleft between two ranges of hills.

I obtained from him just enough to enable me, little by little, to release the essential McTurk from the collective prison of the minds of those who knew him, and to detain him in your name as he emerged. Even so, I call this Dan McIntosh's tale, for without him I might never have discovered McTurk at all. It was nourished in me as much by Dan's pregnant reticence and powerful withholding as by my own curiosity.

Years ago the level of Loch Silloch was raised by forty feet, when it ceased to be only a loch and became also a reservoir, part of a great electrical power scheme. Far down the loch, in a keeper's three-roomed cottage on the inmost curve of a lonely bay which was feathered down to the water's edge with green conifers, lived McTurk. He was a keeper and had been there for thirty years, a favourite with the great folk who stalked and shot over the moors in season, a by-word among them because of his deep knowledge of the game.

He and his red-headed wife, Dolly, raised a family of four—two boys and two girls. Each time Dolly was to have a child, John sailed with her in his dinghy to Loristoun at the far end of the loch, where she stayed with relatives until the baby was born; then he came and took her back to the bay. While she was away, he looked after the other children. It is said that man and wife loved each other with an extraordinary devotion and complete understanding, and I believe it.

For I have stayed the night alone at their abandoned cottage, sleeping rolled in blankets on the bare boards of their deserted floor. I have cooked over their hearth and hung my kettles on their hook above the fire, stood my tin teapot on their hob. Even as you enter their door you feel a peace of mind deeper than that born of the world of silence and beauty on their threshhold. As you lie down to sleep this unearthly peace wraps you round. It is as though warmth and affection have entered into the very timbers of the house, and the whole place breathes and emanates kindness and love.

It was from here, on the morning when they opened the tunnel connecting Loch Silloch with Loch Ruaich a thousand feet above it

in the hills, and when Silloch began gradually, inexorably to fill, that McTurk set forth on his mission. He went out, as I believe, now that I have heard the evidence, to console his love the loch for the change which was to come over its face. This may seem fanciful, but I have written down many explanations of his actions, listened to many different stories about him and his work, and I believe this is true—that love was the source of the singular power from which sprang John McTurk's great victory. I first got the clue from Iain Grant McPherson, owner of the Loch Silloch Hotel, a big, solid, kind, perceptive man, all heart and humour and shrewdness. In his own bar one night we were discussing "McTurk's names."

"When the water rose," he said, "John McTurk was out with his boat all day and all night long, rowing and sailing about like a mad thing. One minute he was here, one minute there, and he never spoke about it to a living soul. Nobody knew at the time what he was doing—not even himself. But I know now. He was looking after the loch. He was worried how it'd take the change. He loved it."

Iain's voice is extraordinarily soft and gentle, with a Highland sing-song about it. He is able unblinkingly to summon up a touch of the fantastic, the unreal; parade it before you; then return cannily to the practicalities of innkeeping.

"How long after was it that the names began to appear?" I asked.

"Oh, soon!" was the reply. "From the very first. Ye see, he'd take folk out fishing with him, and the new names he used for the places'd be that good, they'd catch on. And, ye see, there's not all that to talk about up here. It came to be a joke—'McTurk's names'—then, one season, I don't remember which it was, we found the old names had died and the new ones had caught on—all except Prince Charlie's Cave. It got stranded out of history, up where it's always been, on the hill opposite John McTurk's own bay, where his cottage is. I suppose it was God reminding him that he couldna do any damn thing he liked with the loch."

Iain, as he often did, ended his sentence on a note of irony particularly his own, then went about his business for five minutes.

When he came back, he asked me: "Have ye heard the story of any of the names? I can tell ye a few, but not all. When the water rose, it had to cover a small village, called Lachan, where John's wife, Dolly, was born. Her mother kept the shop there. It was just a wee village of grey stone and slate, with a letterbox, a shop and a pub. That was the first place he went to when the flood started to rise. He rowed about the streets for a whole day and watched the water up above the doors, to the top-storey windows. Then he left. When he passed by next time, there was nothing showing, only one chimney

—the chimney of the house where Dolly was born! It went too, at last, but in his names he remembered that chimney—so Dolly's Lum was what he called the bay that came where the village was. The same with Lost Lovers' Seat. That was the place in the pine-woods south of Dolly's Lum where he did his courting with Dolly . . ."

So much for Iain Grant McPherson.

Then there was old Geordie Cradock, the power station foreman. One golden evening in late July I fished with him at Ruaich, and as we walked home in the blue gloaming, down the stony path from the hill, I asked him if he had known John McTurk. He stopped dead in his tracks and spoke warmly—that dry, unemotional little man, under his round, grey tweed hat. It surprised me.

"Know him? Man, I loved him. There was never another like him round here, never. Nor anywhere else. He saw everything. Why man, if you'd pushed one of the big boulders off the shore into the deep water at some place right away down the loch, I believe he'd have known about it by instinct, and the next time he was down drinking at Iain's and had had a drop too much, he'd have started shouting and yelling that somebody was playing about with his loch and how he'd like to catch the man who was doing it!"

Geordie waved his pipe at me and laughed.

"Of course, it'd have been clean ridiculous, but the way he'd have said it would have made folk hold their tongues! Then he'd have left the place weeping whisky tears and blethering about people being unkind to his loch. Nobody'd have minded him and he'd have rowed home, sobering up on the way, or slept in the heather and left for home in the morning."

He stopped, and we walked on down the hill.

"Go on," I said, "I want to hear more about him."

Geordie took off his hat and scratched his thin, sandy hair with a bent finger.

"Aye," he continued reflectively, "we all loved him, but ye know, when he died, nobody was sad. That was a queer thing, was it not? There was hardly a person in Loristoun that could walk that didn't go to the funeral. He wasna an important man, as ye might say, but the big people round here all came down for it. Old Colquhoun—the old man, he's dead now, too—spoke at the graveside.

"I remember he began: 'We are gathered here to rejoice over the long life of our old friend John McTurk, and to say good-bye fittingly, as is just and right, to a famous Highlandman . . .' then went on, in a nice humble way, to say that he himself had been born to an ancient name and a great estate, but when his time came there

would not be so many or so fine to see him down as at this gathering at the grave of a man who had made his own name and won his own estate, the freedom of Silloch, its waters and its hills . . . It was fine, man, fine ! A lot of us wept like bairns, but we werena miserable, for mind, John was a great old rascal too ! There were pieces about him in *The Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald* and in one of the London papers too. He'd never have believed it, would John."

It was after this talk that I went to the manse and spoke about John McTurk to the minister, in his own neat garden. The Reverend Gavin Knox was as serious and as orderly as his garden, and as clean and as starched as the white curtains of the manse.

" Aye, a drinker was our John," he said, weighing his words. " But there was such a great goodness in the man that I never had the heart to speak to him as severely as I should."

He sighed, deploring his own weakness as much as John's, and smiled his rather wintry smile. I never liked the Reverend Knox better than on that day.

" Ah, that goodness ! It was a beautiful thing. Sober, he loved mankind and the whole earth, ' the sea and all that in them is.' He used to sit in his boat for hours, just taking everything in. Nothing was too small for him—the bushes and the trees, the birds, the fish, the wild creatures and the tame beasts. He loved them all. Drunk, he was a fool, but who isn't ? I remember the year of the great snow—was it 'twenty-three ?—when over half our sheep and lambs died on the hills up there. John McTurk never slept for five nights bringing them down one by one . . . the good shepherd.

" When they raised the level of the loch, he found a poor black-faced sheep stranded out on a hill that's now an island. Before the poor silly creature woke up to what was happening, it was thirty feet from the shore, with water between it and the land. It didn't dare wade through the water. John saved it in his boat and called the place Sheep Shallow. You know it, do you ? "

I nodded. " What about the Gadarene Wood ? " I asked.

" You see yon alder wood that runs down to the edge of the loch ? " he said. " Next time you're that way, look and you'll see what John McTurk meant. Every year a few more trees lose their hold on the bank and fall into the loch. The ones behind them look to be pushing forward, leaning towards the water. A wee bit farther back from the shore, it's as if they were leaning back, trying to stop. Like the swine in the scriptures, they seem to be running down into the sea."

" He was a poet ! " I cried.

" Man, how he'd have laughed at you ! " said the Reverend Knox as he shook me by the hand and bade me good-bye.

But John McTurk was a poet nevertheless. Last year at Loristoun I had proof positive. While I was staying at Iain's place, my host led me one evening up to a fellow guest. She was a small, stiff, homespun old lady, as old as Scotland, with grey, still eyes. Iain told me she had been a dear friend of John McTurk's, having fished with him as her ghillie every year for ten years.

" A poet ? " she queried softly. " Ah yes, I suppose he was—if you can be one without ever writing a line. What he left us is in here all the same "—she tapped her brow with frail fingers—" in our heads. John McTurk'd sit in his boat with you, looking as proud of his loch as if it'd been his baby : and every year the same. When he'd had a few too many of an evening—and that was often—he'd talk about fishing in a way I never heard anyone do before or since.

" ' Ah, Mrs. Tulloch,' he'd say, ' I canna abide the man or woman who thinks nothing of fishing unless there's a heap of fish being caught. Can folk no' fish like me, just for the peace and the work that makes them sleep at night, the sun on the water and the wet of the rain on their faces ? What way can they no' ? '

" I'd smile at him and say, ' I don't know John, I'm sure.'

" Then, one day, he went on : ' D'ye know yer stars, Mrs. Tulloch ? When it's clear at night, they lie on the top of the water like winking flowers. If the fish arena taking the fly, I bait up wi' a worm, mark a star and throw out my line at it. Did ye ever throw a line for Venus, Mrs. Tulloch ? '

" I'll always remember that," she said. " ' Did I ever throw a line for Venus ? ' Aye, John was a poet all right. You could spend days with him and never be tired of his company. He always saw the world as it really is—kind and full of beauty. Or maybe it isn't, but it takes a good man like John McTurk to feel it is."

Such were the people who spoke for John McTurk. Every year when I go down to stop in his house for a few days to fish " for peace and the work that makes me sleep at night," I go with a little more knowledge about him, but there is no need any longer to collect it from people, to screw it out of them. His tales come to me, as though drawn by the magnet of my affection, by themselves.

This year as I nosed my boat round the rocky point into McTurk's Bay where, thirty yards from the loch, his house sits alone, beside the burn with its tranquil voice and water with a taste like ice and sugar, I felt for the first time that I had captured him, attained the heart of him. I was ready at last to set down his fame and his achievement so that it might not be wholly forgotten.

A fine rain was blowing off the bay towards the hills, there was a friendly silence in the place, and the air carried the delicate, persistent scent of pines. The water lapped and flapped against my boat

as I steered her in, her white sail great with a small, sufficient wind. The approach to McTurk's blessed shore has long been for me a moment of quiet exultation and rejoicing.

This time I came to relive in my mind, over a lone weekend, McTurk's last voyage, when he returned to his bay to die. That night, the bay conspired to show me its whole magic which had enthralled McTurk in his lifetime, and called to him again at the last.

His return took place in this way. When one night Dolly McTurk died in her sleep, an old lady, and he sailed her down reverently to her burial at Loristoun, his daughters who were married there persuaded him to live in the village. They found him a little house of his own, for he was an independent creature, not born to be anyone's lodger. By now John was a very old man, but after six months of exile, one morning he got up early, went down secretly to the loch and got out his boat. He filled it with provisions, blankets, pots and pans and a camp bed, and sailed off home without a word. Three weeks later, by his own hearth, he died.

On my way down the loch, I pictured to myself his solitary, triumphant journey, past the small world he had renamed. I doubt if he realised the nature of his triumph. Certainly he did not consider it, as I do, a unique and beautiful feat.

That night I slept early, for the winds on the way down had been light and I had done a good deal of rowing. In the small hours, I woke to a sound of rubbing on the walls of John's house. It was an eerie sound. When I rose and unrolled myself, doffing sleep with my blankets, there was granted me a sight that I may never see again. A herd of deer, down from the hills, was all round the house, grazing down towards the water's edge. The sound which had awakened me came from a stag, rubbing himself against the door of the woodshed. For five minutes I watched them from the porch and let them drink. Then I showed myself and they bounded away, leaving me alone.

Sleep had altogether forsaken me, so I put up a rod and fished the loch until dawn. It was as though John McTurk were with me. I trod the green shore in his footsteps and they were warm with his love of the loch and of all mankind. As the wind died, the moon rose and the stars spangled the glassy water, I walked his haunts and planned to "throw a line for Venus" in his memory—this story.

* * *

GROWING PAINS

Before I was born
They threshed the corn ;
Before I was three
They were threshing me.

KENNETH HOPKINS

Image of Love

Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?

W. B. YEATS

ON the clear gold of wide horizons,
Where line of reed and curve of heron
Were damascened in subtle smith-work,
My fancy carved your image also
And gave to me as much delight
As if my hands had carved with chisels
Your mystery haunting pulse and memory.
And who shall say which is more real,
And how long one outlives the other,
Tangible shape or thought unbodied,
When inward sweep the tides of night?

GEOFFREY JOHNSON

BORN of the foam, stargirded, crowned with flowers,
The Cyprian Aphrodite long ago
Laid her immortal finger on your brows
And marked you for her own and bade you grow
To be the sorrow and delight of man:
Heart of a flame and music to the eyes:
The Lilith who survives since time began,
Through Helen and Iseult, and never dies.

H. S. MACKINTOSH

★*Miss Amelia ate her Sunday dinners by herself. She was a tall, solitary figure, odd and uncouth, the richest woman in that lonely Southern town. She owned the store and ran out the best liquor in the county. Except for her strange, dangerous ten-day marriage to Marvin Macy—now turned criminal and locked away in Atlanta penitentiary—nothing had happened to change her way of life until that April evening when the dirty, poverty-stricken hunchback came to her door. "I am kin to her," he said, and Miss Amelia took him to live with her. Because of Cousin Lymon's boastful desire for company, she turned the store into a café. Miss Amelia loved Cousin Lymon.*

The Last Part of

THE BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFE

by CARSON McCULLERS

DURING the four years in which the store became a café the rooms upstairs were not changed. This part of the premises remained exactly as it had been all of Miss Amelia's life, as it was in the time of her father, and most likely his father before him. The three rooms, it is already known, were immaculately clean. The smallest object had its exact place, and everything was wiped and dusted by Jeff, the servant of Miss Amelia, each morning.

The front room belonged to Cousin Lymon—it was the room where Marvin Macy had stayed during the few nights he was allowed on the premises, and before that it was the bedroom of Miss Amelia's father. The room was furnished with a large wardrobe, a bureau covered with a stiff white linen cloth crocheted at the edges, and a marble-topped table. The bed was immense, an old four-poster made of carved, dark rosewood. On it were two feather mattresses, bolsters, and a number of hand-made comforts.

The bed was so high that beneath it were two wooden steps—no occupant had ever used these steps before, but Cousin Lymon drew them out each night and walked up in state. Beside the steps, but pushed modestly out of view, there was a china chamber-pot painted with pink roses. No rug covered the dark, polished floor and the curtains were of some white stuff, also crocheted at the edges.

On the other side of the parlour was Miss Amelia's bedroom, and it was smaller and very simple. The bed was narrow and made of pine. There was a bureau for her breeches, shirts, and Sunday dress, and she had hammered two nails in the closet wall on which to hang her swamp boots. There were no curtains, rugs, or ornaments of any kind.

The large middle room, the parlour, was elaborate. The rosewood sofa, upholstered in threadbare green silk, was before the fire-place. Marble-topped tables, two sewing-machines, a big vase of pampas grass—everything was rich and grand. The most important piece of furniture in the parlour was a big, glass-doored cabinet in which was kept a number of treasures and curios.

Miss Amelia had added two objects to this collection—one was a large acorn from a water oak, the other a little velvet box holding two small, greyish stones. Sometimes when she had nothing much to do, Miss Amelia would take out this velvet box and stand by the window with the stones in the palm of her hand, looking down at them with a mixture of fascination, dubious respect, and fear. They were the kidney stones of Miss Amelia herself, and had been taken from her by the doctor in Cheehaw some years ago.

It had been a terrible experience, from the first minute to the last, and all she had got out of it were those two little stones; she was bound to set great store by them, or else admit to a mighty sorry bargain. So she kept them and in the second year of Cousin Lymon's stay with her she had them set as ornaments in a watch chain which she gave to him. The other object she had added to the collection, the large acorn, was precious to her—but when she looked at it her face was always saddened and perplexed.

"Amelia, what does it signify?" Cousin Lymon asked her.

"Why, it's just an acorn," she answered. "Just an acorn I picked up on the afternoon Big Papa died."

"How do you mean?" Cousin Lymon insisted.

"I mean it's just an acorn I spied on the ground that day. I picked it up and put it in my pocket. But I don't know why."

"What a peculiar reason to keep it," Cousin Lymon said.

The talks of Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon in the rooms upstairs, usually in the first few hours of the morning when the hunchback could not sleep, were many. As a rule, Miss Amelia was a silent woman, not letting her tongue run wild on any subject that happened to pop into her head. There were certain topics of conversation, however, in which she took pleasure. All these subjects had one point in common—they were interminable. She liked to contemplate problems which could be worked over for decades and still remain insoluble.

Cousin Lymon, on the other hand, enjoyed talking on any subject whatsoever, as he was a great chatterer. Their approach to any conversation was altogether different. Miss Amelia always kept to the broad, rambling generalities of the matter, going on endlessly in a low, thoughtful voice and getting nowhere—while Cousin Lymon would interrupt her suddenly to pick up, magpie fashion, some

detail which, even if unimportant, was at least concrete, with a bearing on some practical fact close at hand.

Some of the favourite subjects of Miss Amelia were: the stars, the reason why Negroes are black, the best treatment for cancer, and so forth. Her father was also an interminable subject which was dear to her.

"Why, Law," she would say to Lymon. "Those days I slept. I'd go to bed just as the lamp was turned on and sleep—why, I'd sleep like I was drowned in warm axle grease. Then come day-break Big Papa would walk in and put his hand down on my shoulder. "Get stirring, Little," he would say. Then later he would holler up the stairs from the kitchen when the stove was hot. 'Fried grits,' he would holler. 'White meat and gravy. Ham and eggs.' And I'd run down the stairs and dress by the hot stove while he was out washing at the pump. Then off we'd go to the still or maybe—"

"The grits we had this morning was poor," Cousin Lymon said. "Fried too quick so that the inside never heated."

"And when Big Papa would run off the liquor in those days—"

The conversation would go on endlessly, with Miss Amelia's long legs stretched out before the hearth; for winter or summer there was always a fire in the grate, as Lymon was cold-natured. He sat in a low chair across from her, his feet not quite touching the floor and his torso usually well-wrapped in a blanket or the green wool shawl. Miss Amelia never mentioned her father to anyone except Cousin Lymon.

That was one of the ways in which she showed her love for him. He had her confidence in the most delicate and vital matters. He alone knew where she kept the chart that showed where certain barrels of whisky were buried on a piece of property near by. He alone had access to her bank-book and the key to the cabinet of curios. He took money from the cash register, whole handfuls of it, and appreciated the loud jingle it made inside his pockets.

He owned almost everything on the premises, for when he was cross Miss Amelia would prowl about and find him some present—so that now there was hardly anything left close at hand to give him.

The only part of her life that she did not want Cousin Lymon to share with her was the memory of her ten-day marriage. Marvin Macy was the one subject that was never, at any time, discussed between the two of them.

So let the slow years pass and come to a Saturday evening six years after the time when Cousin Lymon came first to the town. It was August and the sky had burned above the town like a sheet of flame all day. Now the green twilight was near and there was a feeling of repose.

The street was coated an inch deep with dry golden dust and the little children ran about half-naked, sneezed often, sweated, and were fretful. The mill had closed down at noon. People in the houses along the main street sat resting on their steps and the women had palmetto fans.

At Miss Amelia's there was a sign at the front of the premises saying CAFE. The back porch was cool with latticed shadows and there Cousin Lymon sat turning the ice-cream freezer—often he unpacked the salt and ice and removed the dasher to lick a bit and see how the work was coming on. Jeff cooked in the kitchen.

Early that morning Miss Amelia had put a notice on the wall of the front porch reading: *Chicken Dinner—Twenty Cents Tonite.* The café was already open and Miss Amelia had just finished a period of work in her office. All the eight tables were occupied and from the mechanical piano came a jingling tune.

In a corner, near the door and sitting at a table with a child, was Henry Macy. He was drinking a glass of liquor, which was unusual for him, as liquor went easily to his head and made him cry or sing. His face was very pale and his left eye worked constantly in a nervous tic, as it was apt to do when he was agitated.

He had come into the café sidewise and silent, and when he was greeted he did not speak. The child next to him belonged to Horace Wells, and he had been left at Miss Amelia's that morning to be doctored.

Miss Amelia came out from her office in good spirits. She attended to a few details in the kitchen and entered the café with the pope's nose of a hen between her fingers, as that was her favourite piece. She looked about the room, saw that in general all was well, and went over to the corner table by Henry Macy. She turned the chair round and sat straddling the back, as she only wanted to pass the time of day and was not yet ready for her supper.

There was a bottle of Kroup Kure in the hip pocket of her overalls—a medicine made from whisky, rock candy, and a secret ingredient. Miss Amelia uncorked the bottle and put it to the mouth of the child. Then she turned to Henry Macy and, seeing the nervous winking of his left eye, she asked:

"What ails you?"

Henry Macy seemed on the point of saying something difficult, but, after a long look into the eyes of Miss Amelia, he swallowed and did *not* speak.

So Miss Amelia returned to her patient. Only the child's head showed above the table top. His face was very red, with the eyelids half-closed and the mouth partly open. He had a large, hard, swollen boil on his thigh, and had been brought to Miss Amelia so that it could be opened.

But Miss Amelia used a special method with children; she did not like to see them hurt, struggling, and terrified. So she had kept the child around the premises all day, giving him liquorice and frequent doses of the Kroup Kure, and toward evening she tied a napkin round his neck and let him eat his fill of the dinner. Now as he sat at the table his head wobbled slowly from side to side and sometimes as he breathed there came from him a little worn-out grunt.

There was a stir in the café and Miss Amelia looked round

quickly. Cousin Lymon had come in. The hunchback strutted into the café as he did every night, and when he reached the exact centre of the room he stopped short and looked shrewdly around him, summing up the people and making a quick pattern of the emotional material at hand that night.

The hunchback was a great mischief-maker. He enjoyed any kind of to-do, and without saying a word he could set people at each other in a way that was miraculous. It was due to him that the Rainey twins had quarrelled over a jack-knife two years past, and had not spoken one word to each other since. He was present at the big fight between Rip Welborn and Robert Calvert Hale, and every other fight for that matter since he had come into the town. He nosed around everywhere, knew the intimate business of everybody, and trespassed every waking hour.

Yet, queerly enough, in spite of this it was the hunchback who was most responsible for the great popularity of the café. Things were never so gay as when he was around. When he walked into the room there was always a quick feeling of tension, because with this busybody about there was never any telling what might descend on you, or what might suddenly be brought to happen in the room. People are never so free with themselves and so recklessly glad as when there is some possibility of commotion or calamity ahead. So when the hunchback marched into the café everyone looked around at him and there was a quick outburst of talking and a drawing of corks.

Lymon waved his hand to Stumpy MacPhail who was sitting with Merlie Ryan and Henry Ford Crimp. "I walked to Rotten Lake today to fish," he said. "And on the way I stepped over what appeared at first to be a big fallen tree. But then as I stepped over I felt something stir and I took this second look and there I was straddling this here alligator long as from the front door to the kitchen and thicker than a hog."

The hunchback chattered on. Everyone looked at him from time to time, and some kept track of his chattering and others did not. There were times when every word he said was nothing but lying and bragging.

Nothing he said tonight was true. He had lain in bed with a summer quinsy all day long, and had only got up in the late afternoon in order to turn the ice-cream freezer. Everybody knew this, yet he stood there in the middle of the café and held forth with such lies and boasting that it was enough to shrivel the ears.

Miss Amelia watched him with her hands in her pockets and her head turned to one side. There was a softness about her grey, queer eyes and she was smiling gently to herself. Occasionally she glanced from the hunchback to the other people in the café—and then her look was proud, and there was in it the hint of a threat, as though daring anyone to try to hold him to account for all his foolery. Jeff was bringing in the suppers, already served on the plates, and the new electric fans in the café made a pleasant stir of coolness in the air.

" The little young 'un is asleep," said Henry Macy finally.

Miss Amelia looked down at the patient beside her, and composed her face for the matter in hand. The child's chin was resting on the table edge and a trickle of spit or Kroup Kure had bubbled from the corner of his mouth. His eyes were quite closed, and a little family of gnats had clustered peacefully in the corners.

Miss Amelia put her hand on his head and shook it roughly, but the patient did not wake. So Miss Amelia lifted the child from the table, being careful not to touch the sore part of his leg, and went into the office. Henry Macy followed after her and they closed the office door.

Cousin Lymon was bored that evening. There was not much going on, and in spite of the heat the customers in the café were good-humoured. Henry Ford Crimp and Horace Wells sat at the middle table with their arms around each other, sniggering over some long joke—but when he approached them he could make nothing of it as he had missed the beginning of the story.

The moonlight brightened the dusty road, and the dwarfed peach trees were black and motionless : there was no breeze. The drowsy buzz of swamp mosquitoes was like an echo of the silent night. The town seemed dark, except far down the road to the right there was the flicker of a lamp. Somewhere in the darkness a woman sang in a high wild voice and the tune had no start and no finish and was made up of only three notes which went on and on and on.

The hunchback stood leaning against the banister of the porch, looking down the empty road as though hoping that someone would come along.

There were footsteps behind him, then a voice : " Cousin Lymon, your dinner is set out upon the table."

" My appetite is poor tonight," said the hunchback, who had been eating sweet snuff all the day. " There is a sourness in my mouth."

" Just a pick," said Miss Amelia. " The breast, the liver, and the heart."

Together they went back into the bright café, and sat down with Henry Macy. Their table was the largest one in the café, and on it there was a bouquet of swamp lilies in a Coca-Cola bottle.

Miss Amelia had finished with her patient and was satisfied with herself. From behind the closed office door there had come only a few sleepy whimpers, and before the patient could wake up and become terrified it was all over. The child, sleeping deeply, was now slung across the shoulder of his father—his little arms dangling loose along his father's back and his puffed-up face very red. They were leaving the café to go home.

Henry Macy was still silent. He ate carefully, making no noise when he swallowed, and was not a third as greedy as Cousin Lymon who had claimed to have no appetite and was now putting down helping after helping of the dinner. Occasionally Henry Macy looked across at Miss Amelia and again held his peace.

It was a typical Saturday night. An old couple who had come in from the country hesitated for a moment at the door-way, holding each other's hand, and finally decided to come inside. They had lived together so long, this old country couple, that they looked as similar as twins. They were brown, shrivelled, and like two little walking peanuts. They left early, and by midnight most of the other customers were gone.

Rosser Cline and Merlie Ryan still played checkers, and Stumpy MacPhail sat with a liquor bottle on his table (his wife would not allow it in the home) and carried on peaceable conversations with himself. Henry Macy had not yet gone away, and this was unusual, as he almost always went to bed soon after nightfall. Miss Amelia yawned sleepily, but Lymon was restless and she did not suggest that they close up for the night.

Finally, at one o'clock, Henry Macy looked up at the corner of the ceiling and said quietly to Miss Amelia : " I got a letter today."

Miss Amelia was not one to be impressed by this, because all sorts of business letters and catalogues came addressed to her.

" I got a letter from my brother," said Henry Macy.

The hunchback, who had been goose-stepping about the café with his hands clasped behind his head, stopped suddenly. He was quick to sense any change in the atmosphere of a gathering. He glanced at each face in the room and waited.

Miss Amelia scowled and hardened her right fist. " You are welcome to it," she said.

" He is on parole. He is out of the penitentiary."

The face of Miss Amelia was very dark, and she shivered although the night was warm. Stumpy MacPhail and Merlie Ryan pushed aside their checker game. The café was very quiet.

" Who ? " asked Cousin Lymon. His large, pale ears seemed to grow on his head and stiffen. " What ? "

Miss Amelia slapped her hands palm down on the table. " Because Marvin Macy is a—"

But her voice hoarsened and after a few moments she only said : " He belongs to be in that penitentiary the balance of his life."

" What did he do ? " asked Cousin Lymon.

There was a long pause, as no one knew exactly how to answer this. " He robbed three filling stations," said Stumpy MacPhail. But his words did not sound complete and there was a feeling of sins left unmentioned.

The hunchback was impatient. He could not bear to be left out of anything, even a great misery. The name Marvin Macy was unknown to him, but it tantalized him as did any mention of subjects which others knew about and of which he was ignorant—such as any reference to the old sawmill that had been torn down before he came, or a chance word about poor Morris Finestein, or the recollection of any event that had occurred before his time.

Apart from this inborn curiosity, the hunchback took a great interest in robbers and crimes of all varieties. As he strutted around

the table he was muttering the words "released on parole" and "penitentiary" to himself. But although he questioned insistently, he was unable to find anything, as nobody would dare to talk about Marvin Macy before Miss Amelia in the café.

"The letter did not say very much," said Henry Macy. "He did not say where he was going."

"Humph!" said Miss Amelia, and her face was still hardened and very dark. "He will never set his split hoof on my premises."

She pushed back her chair from the table, and made ready to close the café. Thinking about Marvin Macy may have set her to brooding, for she hauled the cash register back to the kitchen and put it in a private place. Henry Macy went off down the dark road. But Henry Ford Crimp and Merlie Ryan lingered for a time on the front porch.

Later Merlie Ryan was to make certain claims, to swear that on that night he had a vision of what was to come. But the town paid no attention, for that was just the sort of thing that Merlie Ryan would claim. Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon talked for a time in the parlour. And when at last the hunchback thought that he could sleep she arranged the mosquito netting over his bed and waited until he had finished with his prayers. Then she put on her long night-gown, smoked two pipes, and only after a long time went to sleep.

That autumn was a happy time. The crops around the countryside were good, and over at the Forks Falls market the price of tobacco held firm that year. After the long hot summer the first cool days had a clean bright sweetness. Golden-rod grew along the dusty roads, and the sugar cane was ripe and purple.

The bus came each day from Cheehaw to carry off a few of the younger children to the consolidated school to get an education. Boys hunted foxes in the pinewoods, winter quilts were aired out on the wash lines, and sweet potatoes bedded in the ground with straw against the colder months to come.

In the evening, delicate shreds of smoke rose from the chimneys, and the moon was round and orange in the autumn sky. There is no stillness like the quiet of the first cold nights in the fall. Sometimes, late in the night when there was no wind, there could be heard in the town the thin wild whistle of the train that goes through Society City on its way far off to the North.

For Miss Amelia Evans this was a time of great activity. She was at work from dawn until sundown. She made a new and bigger condenser for her still, and in one week ran off enough liquor to souse the whole county. Her old mule was dizzy from grinding so much sorghum, and she scalded her Mason jars and put away pear preserves. She was looking forward greatly to the first frost, because she had traded for three tremendous hogs, and intended to make much barbecue, chitterlings, and sausage.

During these weeks there was a quality about Miss Amelia that many people noticed. She laughed often, with a deep ringing laugh

and her whistling had a sassy, tuneful trickery. She was forever trying out her strength, lifting up heavy objects, or poking her tough biceps with her finger. One day she sat down to her typewriter and wrote a story—a story in which there were foreigners, trap-doors, and millions of dollars.

Cousin Lymon was with her always, traipsing along behind her coat-tails, and when she watched him her face had a bright, soft look, and when she spoke his name there lingered in her voice the undertone of love.

The first cold spell came at last. When Miss Amelia awoke one morning there were frost flowers on the window-panes, and rime had silvered the patches of grass in the yard. Miss Amelia built a roaring fire in the kitchen stove, then went out of doors to judge the day. The air was cold and sharp, the sky pale green and cloudless.

Very shortly people began to come in from the country to find out what Miss Amelia thought of the weather; she decided to kill the biggest hog, and word got round the countryside. The hog was slaughtered and a low oak fire started in the barbecue pit. There was the warm smell of pig blood and smoke in the backyard, the stamp of footsteps, the ring of voices in the winter air. Miss Amelia walked around giving orders and soon most of the work was done.

She had some particular business to do in Cheehaw that day, so after making sure that all was going well, she cranked up her car and got ready to leave. She asked Cousin Lymon to come with her, in fact, she asked him seven times, but he was loath to leave the commotion and wanted to remain. This seemed to trouble Miss Amelia, as she always liked to have him near to her, and was prone to be terribly homesick when she had to go any distance away. But after asking him seven times, she did not urge him any further.

Before leaving she found a stick and drew a heavy line all around the barbecue pit, about two feet back from the edge, and told him not to trespass beyond that boundary. She left after dinner and intended to be back before dark.

Now, it is not so rare to have a truck or an automobile pass along the road and through the town on the way from Cheehaw to somewhere else.

Every year the tax-collector comes to argue with rich people such as Miss Amelia. And if somebody in the town, such as Merlie Ryan, takes a notion that he can connive to get a car on credit, or to pay down three dollars and have a fine electric ice-box such as they advertise in the store windows of Cheehaw, then a city man will come out asking meddlesome questions, finding out all his troubles, and ruining his chances of buying anything on the instalment plan.

Sometimes, especially since they are working on the Forks Falls highway, the cars hauling the chain gang come through the town. And frequently people in automobiles get lost and stop to inquire how they can find the right road again. So, late that afternoon it was nothing unusual to have a truck pass the mill and stop in the middle of the road near the café of Miss Amelia. A man jumped down from the back of the truck, and the truck went on its way.

The man stood in the middle of the road and looked about him. He was a tall man, with brown curly hair, and slow-moving, deep-blue eyes. His lips were red and he smiled the lazy, half-mouthed smile of the braggart. The man wore a red shirt, and a wide belt of tooled leather; he carried a tin suitcase and a guitar.

The first person in the town to see this newcomer was Cousin Lymon, who had heard the shifting of gears and come around to investigate. The hunchback stuck his head round the corner of the porch, but did not step out altogether into full view.

He and the man stared at each other, and it was not the look of two strangers meeting for the first time and swiftly summing up each other. It was a peculiar stare they exchanged between them, like the look of two criminals who recognize each other. Then the man in the red shirt shrugged his left shoulder and turned away. The face of the hunchback was very pale as he watched the man go down the road, and after a few moments he began to follow along carefully, keeping many paces away.

It was immediately known throughout the town that Marvin Macy had come back again. First, he went to the mill, propped his elbows lazily on a window-sill and looked inside. He liked to watch others hard at work, as do all born loafers.

The mill was thrown into a sort of numb confusion. The dyers left the hot vats, the spinners and weavers forgot about their machines, and even Stumpy MacPhail, who was foreman, did not know exactly what to do.

Marvin Macy—still smiled his wet half-mouthed smiles, and when he saw his brother, his bragging expression did not change.

After looking over the mill Marvin Macy went down the road to the house where he had been raised, and left his suitcase and guitar on the front porch. Then he walked around the mill-pond, looked over the church, the three stores, and the rest of the town.

The hunchback trudged along quietly at some distance behind him, his hands in his pockets, and his little face still very pale.

It had grown late. The red winter sun was setting, and to the west the sky was deep gold and crimson. Ragged chimney swifts flew to their nest; lamps were lighted. Now and then there was the smell of smoke, and the warm rich odour of the barbecue slowly cooking in the pit behind the café.

After making the rounds of the town Marvin Macy stopped before Miss Amelia's premises and read the sign above the porch. Then, not hesitating to trespass, he walked through the side yard.

The mill whistle blew a thin, lonesome blast, and the day's shift was done. Soon there were others in Miss Amelia's backyard beside Marvin Macy—Henry Ford Crimp, Merlie Ryan, Stumpy MacPhail, and any number of children and people who stood around the edges of the property and looked on. Very little was said. Marvin Macy stood by himself on one side of the pit, and the rest of the people clustered together on the other side.

Cousin Lymon stood somewhat apart from everyone, and he did not take his eyes from the face of Marvin Macy.

"Did you have a good time in the penitentiary?" asked Merlie Ryan, with a silly giggle.

Marvin Macy did not answer. He took from his hip pocket a large knife, opened it slowly, and honed the blade on the seat of his pants. Merlie Ryan grew suddenly very quiet and went to stand directly behind the broad back of Stumpy MacPhail.

Miss Amelia did not come home until almost dark. They heard the rattle of her automobile while she was still a long distance away, then the slam of the door and a bumping noise as though she were hauling something up the front steps of her premises. The sun had already set, and in the air there was the blue smoky glow of early winter evenings.

Miss Amelia came down the back steps slowly, and the group in her yard waited very quietly. Few people in this world could stand up to Miss Amelia, and against Marvin Macy she had this special and bitter hate. Everyone waited to see her burst into a terrible holler, snatch up some dangerous object, and chase him altogether out of town.

At first she did not see Marvin Macy, and her face had the relieved and dreamy expression that was natural to her when she reached home after having gone some distance away.

Miss Amelia must have seen Marvin Macy and Cousin Lymon at the same instant. She looked from one to the other, but it was not the wastrel from the penitentiary on whom she finally fixed her gaze of sick amazement. She, and everyone else, was looking at Cousin Lymon, and he was a sight to see.

The hunchback stood at the end of the pit, his pale face lighted by the soft glow from the smouldering oak fire. Cousin Lymon had a very peculiar accomplishment, which he used whenever he wished to ingratiate himself with someone. He would stand very still, and with just a little concentration, he could wiggle his large pale ears with marvellous quickness and ease. This trick he always used when he wanted to get something special out of Miss Amelia, and to her it was irresistible.

Now as he stood there the hunchback's ears were wiggling furiously on his head, but it was not Miss Amelia at whom he was looking this time. The hunchback was smiling at Marvin Macy with an entreaty that was near to desperation. At first Marvin Macy paid no attention to him, and when he did finally glance at the hunchback it was without any appreciation whatsoever.

"What ails this Brokeback?" he asked with a rough jerk of his thumb.

No one answered. And Cousin Lymon, seeing that his accomplishment was getting him nowhere, added new efforts of persuasion. He fluttered his eyelids, so that they were like pale, trapped moths in his sockets. He scraped his feet around on the ground, waved his hands about, and finally began doing a little trotlike dance. In the last gloomy light of the winter afternoon he resembled the child of a swamp-haunt.

Marvin Macy, alone of all the people in the yard was unimpressed.

"Is the runt throwing a fit?" he asked, and when no one answered he stepped forward and gave Cousin Lymon a cuff on the side of his head. The hunchback staggered, then fell back on the ground. He sat where he had fallen, still looking up at Marvin Macy, and with great effort his ears managed one last forlorn little flap.

Now everyone turned to Miss Amelia to see what she would do. In all these years no one had so much as touched a hair of Cousin Lymon's head, although many had had the itch to do so. If anyone even spoke crossly to the hunchback, Miss Amelia would cut off this rash mortal's credit and find ways of making things go hard for him a long time afterward. So now if Miss Amelia had split open Marvin Macy's head with the axe on the back porch no one would have been surprised. But she did nothing of the kind.

There were times when Miss Amelia seemed to go into a sort of trance. And the cause of these trances was usually known and understood. For Miss Amelia was a fine doctor, and did not grind up swamp roots and other untried ingredients and give them to the first patient who came along; whenever she invented a new medicine she always tried it out first on herself.

She would swallow an enormous dose and spend the following day walking thoughtfully back and forth from the café to the brick privy. Often, when there was a sudden keen gripe, she would stand quite still, her queer eyes staring down at the ground and her fists clenched; she was trying to decide which organ was being worked upon, and what misery the new medicine might be most likely to cure.

And now as she watched the hunchback and Marvin Macy, her face wore this same expression, tense with reckoning some inward pain, although she had taken no new medicine that day.

"That will learn you, Brokeback," said Marvin Macy.

Henry Macy pushed back his limp, whitish hair from his forehead and coughed nervously. Stumpy MacPhail and Merlie Ryan shuffled their feet, and the children and black people on the outskirts of the property made not a sound. Marvin Macy folded the knife he had been honing, and after looking about him fearlessly he swaggered out of the yard. The embers in the pit were turning to grey feathery ashes and it was now quite dark.

That was the way Marvin Macy came back from the penitentiary. Not a living soul in all the town was glad to see him. Even Mrs. Mary Hale, who was a good woman and had raised him with love and care—at the first sight of him even this old foster mother dropped the skillet she was holding and burst into tears.

But nothing could faze that Marvin Macy. He sat on the back steps of the Hale house, lazily picking his guitar, and when the supper was ready, he pushed the children of the household out of the way and served himself a big meal, although there had been barely enough hoecakes and white meat to go round. After eating he settled himself in the best and warmest sleeping-place in the front room and was untroubled by dreams.

Miss Amelia did not open the café that night. She locked the doors and all the windows very carefully, nothing was seen of her and Cousin Lymon, and a lamp burned in her room all the night long.

Marvin Macy brought with him bad fortune, right from the first, as could be expected. The next day the weather turned suddenly, and it became hot. Even in the early morning there was a sticky sultriness in the atmosphere, the wind carried the rotten smell of the swamp, and delicate shrill mosquitoes webbed the green mill-pond. It was unseasonable, worse than August, and much damage was done. For nearly everyone in the county who owned a hog had copied Miss Amelia and slaughtered the day before. And what sausage could keep in such weather as this?

After a few days there was everywhere the smell of slowly spoiling meat, and an atmosphere of dreary waste. Worse yet, a family reunion near the Forks Falls highway ate roast pork and died, every one of them. It was plain that their hog had been infected —and who could tell whether the rest of the meat was safe or not? People were torn between the longing for the good taste of pork, and the fear of death. It was a time of waste and confusion.

The cause of all this, Marvin Macy, had no shame in him. He was seen everywhere. During work hours he loafed about the mill, looking in at the windows, and on Sundays he dressed in his red shirt and paraded up and down the road with his guitar.

He was still handsome—with his brown hair, his red lips, and his broad strong shoulders; but the evil in him was now too famous for his good looks to get him anywhere. And this evil was not measured only by the actual sins he had committed. True, he had robbed those filling stations. And before that he had ruined the tenderest girls in the county and laughed about it.

Any number of wicked things could be listed against him, but quite apart from these crimes there was about him a secret meanness that clung to him almost like a smell. Another thing—he never sweated, not even in August, and that surely is a sign worth pondering over.

Now it seemed to the town that he was more dangerous than he had ever been before, and that in the penitentiary in Atlanta he must have learned the method of laying charms. Otherwise how could his effect on Cousin Lymon be explained? For since first setting eyes on Marvin Macy the hunchback was possessed by an unnatural spirit.

Every minute he wanted to be following along behind this jailbird, and he was full of silly schemes to attract attention to himself. Still Marvin Macy either treated him hatefully or failed to notice him at all. Sometimes the hunchback would give up, perch himself on the banister of the front porch much as a sick bird huddles on a telephone wire, and grieve publicly.

"But why?" Miss Amelia would ask, staring at him with her crossed, grey eyes, and her fists closed tight.

"Oh, Marvin Macy," groaned the hunchback, and the sound of the name was enough to upset the rhythm of his sobs so that he hiccupped. "He has been to Atlanta."

Miss Amelia would shake her head and her face was dark and hardened. To begin with she had no patience with any travelling; those who had made the trip to Atlanta or travelled fifty miles from home to see the ocean—those restless people she despised. "Going to Atlanta does no credit to him."

"He has been to the penitentiary," said the hunchback, miserable with longing.

How are you going to argue against such envies as these? In her perplexity Miss Amelia did not herself sound any too sure of what she was saying. "Been to the penitentiary, Cousin Lymon? Why, a trip like that is no travel to brag about."

During these weeks Miss Amelia was closely watched by everyone. She went about absent-mindedly, her face remote as though she had lapsed into one of her gripe trances. For some reason, after the day of Marvin Macy's arrival, she put aside her overalls and wore always the red dress she had before this time reserved for Sundays, funerals, and sessions of the court. Then as the weeks passed she began to take some steps to clear up the situation. But her efforts were hard to understand.

If it hurt her to see Cousin Lymon follow Marvin Macy about the town, why did she not make the issues clear once and for all, and tell the hunchback that if he had dealings with Marvin Macy she would turn him off the premises? That would have been simple, and Cousin Lymon would have had to submit to her, or else face the sorry business of finding himself loose in the world.

But Miss Amelia seemed to have lost her will; for the first time in her life she hesitated as to just what course to pursue. And, like most people in such a position of uncertainty, she did the worst thing possible—she began following several courses at once, all of them contrary to each other.

The café was opened every night as usual, and, strangely enough, when Marvin Macy came swaggering through the door, with the hunchback at his heels, she did not turn him out. She even gave him free drinks and smiled at him in a wild, crooked way. At the same time she set a terrible trap for him out in the swamp that surely would have killed him if he had got caught. She let Cousin Lymon invite him to Sunday dinner, and then tried to trip him up as he went down the steps.

She began a great campaign of pleasure for Cousin Lymon—making exhausting trips to various spectacles being held in distant places, driving the automobile thirty miles to a Chautauqua, taking him to Forks Falls to watch a parade. All in all it was a distracting time for Miss Amelia. In the opinion of most people she was well on her way in the climb up fools' hill, and everyone waited to see how it would all turn out.

The weather turned cold again, the winter was upon the town,

and night came before the last shift in the mill was done. Children kept on all their garments when they slept, and women raised the backs of their skirts to toast themselves dreamily at the fire. After it rained, the mud in the road made hard frozen ruts; there were faint flickers of lamplight from the windows of the houses, the peach trees were scrawny and bare.

In the dark, silent nights of winter-time the café was the warm centre-point of the town, the lights shining so brightly that they could be seen a quarter of a mile away. The great iron stove at the back of the room roared, crackled, and turned red. Miss Amelia had made red curtains for the windows, and from a salesman who passed through the town she bought a great bunch of paper roses that looked very real.

But it was not only the warmth, the decorations, and the brightness, that made the café what it was. There is a deeper reason why the café was so precious to this town. And this deeper reason has to do with a certain pride that had not hitherto been known in these parts.

To understand this new pride the cheapness of human life must be kept in mind. There were always plenty of people clustered around a mill—but it was seldom that every family had enough meal, garments, and fat back to go the rounds.

Life could become one long dim scramble just to get the things needed to keep alive. And the confusing point is this: all useful things have a price, and are bought only with money, as that is the way the world is run. You know without having to reason about it the price of a bale of cotton, or a quart of molasses. But no value has been put on human life; it is given to us free and taken without being paid for.

What is it worth? If you look around, at times the value may seem to be little or nothing at all. Often after you have sweated and tried and things are not better for you, there comes a feeling deep down in the soul that you are not worth much.

But the new pride that the café brought to this town had an effect on almost everyone, even the children. For in order to come to the café you did not have to buy the dinner, or a portion of liquor. There were cold bottled drinks for a nickel. And if you could not even afford that, Miss Amelia had a drink called Cherry Juice which sold for a penny a glass, and was pink-coloured and very sweet. Almost everyone, with the exception of Reverend T. M. Willin, came to the café at least once during the week.

Children love to sleep in houses other than their own, and to eat at a neighbour's table; on such occasions they behave themselves decently and are proud. The people in the town were likewise proud when sitting at the tables in the café. They washed before coming to Miss Amelia's, and scraped their feet very politely on the threshold as they entered the café. There, for a few hours at least, the deep bitter knowing that you are not worth much in this world could be laid low.

The café was a special benefit to bachelors, unfortunate people, and consumptives. And here it may be mentioned that there was

some reason to suspect that Cousin Lymon was consumptive. The brightness of his grey eyes, his insistence, his talkativeness, and his cough—these were all signs. Besides there is generally supposed to be some connection between a hunched spine and consumption.

But whenever this subject had been mentioned to Miss Amelia she had become furious; she denied these symptoms with bitter vehemence, but on the sly she treated Cousin Lymon with hot chest plasters, Kroup Kure, and such. Now this winter the hunchback's cough was worse, and sometimes even on cold days he would break out in a heavy sweat. But this did not prevent him from following along after Marvin Macy.

Early every morning he left the premises and went to the back door of Mrs. Hale's house, and waited and waited—as Marvin Macy was a lazy sleeper. He would stand there and call out softly.

His voice was just like the voices of children who squat patiently over those tiny little holes in the ground where doodlebugs are thought to live, poking the hole with a broom straw, and calling plaintively: "Doodlebug, Doodlebug—fly away home. Mrs. Doodlebug, Mrs. Doodlebug. Come out, come out. Your house is on fire and all your children are burning up." In just such a voice—at once sad, luring, and resigned—would the hunchback call Marvin Macy's name each morning.

Then when Marvin Macy came out for the day, he would trail him about the town, and sometimes they would be gone for hours together out in the swamp.

And Miss Amelia continued to do the worst thing possible: that is, to try to follow several courses at once. When Cousin Lymon left the house she did not call him back, but only stood in the middle of the road and watched lonesomely until he was out of sight. Nearly every day Marvin Macy turned up with Cousin Lymon at dinner-time, and ate at her table. Miss Amelia opened the pear preserves, and the table was well-set with ham or chicken, great bowls of hominy grits, and winter peas.

It is true that on one occasion Miss Amelia tried to poison Marvin Macy—but there was a mistake, the plates were confused, and it was she herself who got the poisoned dish. This she quickly realized by the slight bitterness of the food, and that day she ate no dinner. She sat tilted back in her chair, feeling her muscle, and looking at Marvin Macy.

Every night Marvin Macy came to the café and settled himself at the best and largest table, the one in the centre of the room. Cousin Lymon brought him liquor, for which he did not pay a cent. Marvin Macy brushed the hunchback aside as if he were a swamp mosquito, and not only did he show no gratitude for these favours, but would cuff him with the back of his hand, if the hunchback got in his way, or say: "Out of my way, Brokeback—I'll snatch you bald-headed."

When this happened Miss Amelia would come out from behind her counter and approach Marvin Macy very slowly, her fists clenched, her peculiar red dress hanging awkwardly around her bony knees.

Marvin Macy would also clench his fists and they would walk slowly and meaningly around each other. But although everyone watched breathlessly, nothing ever came of it. The time for the fight was not yet ready.

There is one particular reason why this winter is remembered and still talked about. A great thing happened. People woke up on the second of January and found the whole world about them altogether changed. Little ignorant children looked out of the windows, and they were so puzzled that they began to cry. Old people harked back and could remember nothing in these parts to equal the phenomenon. For in the night it had snowed.

In the dark hours after midnight the dim flakes started falling softly on the town. By dawn the ground was covered, and the strange snow banked the ruby windows of the church, and whitened the roofs of the houses. The snow gave the town a drawn, bleak look. The two-room houses near the mill were dirty, crooked, and seemed about to collapse, and somehow everything was dark and shrunken.

But the snow itself—there was a beauty about it few people around here had ever known before. The snow was not white, as Northerners had pictured it to be; in the snow there were soft colours of blue and silver, the sky was a gentle shining grey. And the dreamy quietness of falling snow—when had the town been so silent?

People reacted to the snow-fall in various ways. Miss Amelia, on looking out of her window, thoughtfully wiggled the toes of her bare feet, gathered close to her neck the collar of her night-gown. She stood there for some time, then commenced to draw the shutters and lock every window on the premises. She closed the place completely, lighted the lamps, and sat solemnly over her bowl of grits.

The reason for this was not that Miss Amelia feared the snow-fall. It was simply that she was unable to form an immediate opinion of this new event, and unless she knew exactly and definitely what she thought of a matter (which was nearly always the case) she preferred to ignore it. Snow had never fallen in this county in her lifetime, and she had never thought about it one way or the other. But if she admitted this snow-fall she would have to come to some decision, and in those days there was enough distraction in her life as it was already.

So she poked about the gloomy, lamp-lighted house and pretended that nothing had happened. Cousin Lymon on the contrary, chased around in the wildest excitement, and when Miss Amelia turned her back to dish him some breakfast he slipped out of the door.

Marvin Macy laid claim to the snow-fall. He said that he knew snow, had seen it in Atlanta, and from the way he walked about the town that day it was as though he owned every flake. He sneered at the little children who crept timidly out of the houses and scooped up handfuls of snow to taste.

Reverend Willin hurried down the road with a furious face, as he was thinking deeply and trying to weave the snow into his Sunday sermon. Most people were humble and glad about this marvel; they

spoke in hushed voices and said " thank you " and " please " more than was necessary. A few weak characters, of course, were demoralized and got drunk—but they were not numerous. To everyone this was an occasion and many counted their money and planned to go to the café that night.

Cousin Lymon followed Marvin Macy about all day, seconding his claim to the snow. He marvelled that snow did not fall as does rain, and stared up at the dreamy, gently falling flakes until he stumbled from dizziness. And the pride he took on himself, basking in the glory of Marvin Macy—it was such that many people could not resist calling out to him: "'Oho,' said the fly on the chariot wheel. 'What a dust we do raise.'"

Miss Amelia did not intend to serve a dinner. But when, at six o'clock, there was the sound of footsteps on the porch she opened the front door cautiously. It was Henry Ford Crimp, and though there was no food, she let him sit at a table and served him a drink. Others came. The evening was blue, bitter, and though the snow fell no longer there was a wind from the pine trees that swept up delicate flurries from the ground. Cousin Lymon did not come until after dark, with him Marvin Macy, and he carried his tin suitcase and his guitar.

" So you mean to travel ? " said Miss Amelia quickly.

Marvin Macy warmed himself at the stove. Then he settled down at his table and carefully sharpened a little stick. He picked his teeth, frequently taking the stick out of his mouth to look at the end and wipe it on the sleeve of his coat. He did not bother to answer.

The hunchback looked at Miss Amelia, who was behind the counter. His face was not in the least beseeching ; he seemed quite sure of himself. He folded his hands behind his back and perked up his ears confidently. His cheeks were red, his eyes shining, and his clothes were soggy wet.

" Marvin Macy is going to visit a spell with us," he said.

Miss Amelia made no protest. She only came out from behind the counter and hovered over the stove, as though the news had made her suddenly cold. She did not warm her backside modestly, lifting her skirt only an inch or so, as do most women when in public. There was not a grain of modesty about Miss Amelia, and she frequently seemed to forget altogether that there were men in the room. Now as she stood warming herself, her red dress was pulled up quite high at the back so that a piece of her strong, hairy thigh could be seen by anyone who cared to look at it.

Her head was turned to one side ; and she had begun talking with herself, nodding and wrinkling her forehead, and there was the tone of accusation and reproach in her voice although the words were not plain.

Meanwhile, the hunchback and Marvin Macy had gone upstairs—up to the parlour with the pampas grass and the two sewing-machines, to the private rooms where Miss Amelia had lived the whole of her life. Down in the café you could hear them bumping around, unpacking Marvin Macy, and getting him settled.

That is the way Marvin Macy crowded into Miss Amelia's home. At first Cousin Lymon, who had given Marvin Macy his own room, slept on the sofa in the parlour. But the snow-fall had a bad effect on him ; he caught a cold that turned into a winter quinsy, so Miss Amelia gave up her bed to him. The sofa in the parlour was much too short for her, her feet lapped over the edges, and often she rolled off on to the floor.

Perhaps it was this lack of sleep that clouded her wits ; everything she tried to do against Marvin Macy rebounded on herself. She got caught in her own tricks, and found herself in many pitiful positions. But still she did not put Marvin Macy off the premises, as she was afraid that she would be left alone. Once you have lived with another, it is a great torture to have to live alone. The silence of a firelit room when suddenly the clock stops ticking, the nervous shadows in an empty house—it is better to take in your mortal enemy than face the terror of living alone.

The snow did not last. The sun came out and within two days the town was just as it had always been before. Miss Amelia did not open her house until every flake had melted. Then she had a big house cleaning and aired everything out in the sun. But before that, the very first thing she did on going out again into her yard, was to tie a rope to the largest branch of the chinaberry tree. At the end of the rope she tied a crocus sack tightly stuffed with sand. This was the punching-bag she made for herself and from that day on she would box with it out in her yard every morning. Already she was a fine fighter—a little heavy on her feet, but knowing all manner of mean holds and squeezes to make up for this.

Miss Amelia, as has been mentioned, measured six feet two inches in height. Marvin Macy was one inch shorter. In weight they were about even—both of them weighing close to a hundred and sixty pounds. Marvin Macy had the advantage in slyness of movement, and in toughness of chest. In fact from the outward point of view the odds were altogether in his favour. Yet almost everybody in the town was betting on Miss Amelia ; scarcely a person would put up money on Marvin Macy.

The town remembered the great fight between Miss Amelia and a Forks Fall lawyer who had tried to cheat her. He had been a huge strapping fellow, but he was left three-quarters dead when she had finished with him. And it was not only her talent as a boxer that had impressed everyone—she could demoralize her enemy by making terrifying faces and fierce noises, so that even the spectators were sometimes cowed.

She was brave, she practised faithfully with her punching-bag, and in this case she was clearly in the right. So people had confidence in her, and they waited. Of course there was no set date for this fight. There were just the signs that were too plain to be overlooked.

During these times the hunchback strutted around with a pleased little pinched-up face. In many delicate and clever ways he stirred up trouble between them. He was constantly plucking at Marvin

Macy's trouser leg to draw attention to himself. Sometimes he followed in Miss Amelia's footsteps—but these days it was only in order to imitate her awkward long-legged walk; he crossed his eyes and aped her gestures in a way that made her appear to be a freak.

There was something so terrible about this that even the silliest customers of the café, such as Merlie Ryan, did not laugh. Only Marvin Macy drew up the left corner of his mouth and chuckled. Miss Amelia, when this happened, would be divided between two emotions. She would look at the hunchback with a lost, dismal reproach—then turn toward Marvin Macy with her teeth clamped.

"Bust a gut!" she would say bitterly.

And Marvin Macy, most likely, would pick up the guitar from the floor beside his chair. His voice was wet and slimy, as he always had too much spit in his mouth. And the tunes he sang glided slowly from his throat like eels. His strong fingers picked the strings with dainty skill, and everything he sang both lured and exasperated. This was usually more than Miss Amelia could stand.

"Bust a gut!" she would repeat, in a shout.

But always Marvin Macy had the answer ready for her. He would cover the strings to silence the quivering left-over tones, and reply with slow, sure insolence.

"Everything you holler at me bounces back on yourself. Yah! Yah!"

Miss Amelia would have to stand there helpless, as no one has ever invented a way out of this trap. She could not shout out abuse that would bounce back on herself. He had the best of her, there was nothing she could do.

So things went on like this. What happened between the three of them during the nights in the rooms upstairs nobody knows. But the café became more and more crowded every night. A new table had to be brought in. Even the Hermit, the crazy man named Rainer Smith, who took to the swamp years ago, heard something of the situation and came one night to look in at the window and brood over the gathering in the bright café.

The climax each evening was the time when Miss Amelia and Marvin Macy doubled their fists, squared up, and glared at each other. Usually this did not happen after any especial argument, but it seemed to come about mysteriously, by means of some instinct on the part of both of them. At these times the café would become so quiet that you could hear the bouquet of paper roses rustling in the draught. And each night they held this fighting stance a little longer than the night before.

The fight took place on Ground Hog Day, which is the second of February. The weather was favourable, being neither rainy nor sunny, and with a neutral temperature. There were several signs that this was the appointed day, and by ten o'clock the news spread all over the county.

Early in the morning Miss Amelia went out and cut down her

punching-bag. Marvin Macy sat on the back step with a tin can of hog fat between his knees and carefully greased his arms and his legs. A hawk with a bloody breast flew over the town and circled twice around the property of Miss Amelia. The tables in the café were moved out to the back porch, so that the whole big room was cleared for the fight.

There was every sign. Both Miss Amelia and Marvin Macy ate four helpings of half-raw roast for dinner, and then lay down in the afternoon to store up strength. Marvin Macy rested in the big room upstairs, while Miss Amelia stretched herself out on the bench in her office. It was plain from her white stiff face what a torment it was for her to be lying still and doing nothing, but she lay there quiet as a corpse with her eyes closed and her hands crossed on her chest.

Cousin Lymon had a restless day, and his little face was drawn and tightened with excitement. He put himself up a lunch, and set out to find the ground hog—within an hour he returned, the lunch eaten, and said that the ground hog had seen his shadow and there was to be bad weather ahead. Then, as Miss Amelia and Marvin Macy were both resting to gather strength, and he was left to himself, it occurred to him that he might as well paint the front porch. The house had not been painted for years—in fact, God knows if it had ever been painted at all.

Cousin Lymon scrambled around, and soon he had painted half the floor of the porch a gay bright green. It was a loblolly job, and he smeared himself all over. Typically enough he did not even finish the floor, but changed over to the walls, painting as high as he could reach and then standing on a crate to get up a foot higher. When the paint ran out, the right side of the floor was bright green and there was a jagged portion of wall that had been painted. Cousin Lymon left it at that.

There was something childish about his satisfaction with his painting. And in this respect a curious fact should be mentioned. No one in the town, not even Miss Amelia, had any idea how old the hunchback was. Some maintained that when he came to town he was about twelve years old, still a child—others were certain that he was well past forty.

His eyes were blue and steady as a child's, but there were lavender crêpy shadows beneath these blue eyes that hinted of age. It was impossible to guess his age by his hunched queer body. And even his teeth gave no clue—they were all still in his head (two were broken from cracking a pecan), but he had stained them with so much sweet snuff that it was impossible to decide whether they were old teeth or young teeth.

When questioned directly about his age the hunchback professed to know absolutely nothing—he had no idea how long he had been on the earth, whether for ten years or a hundred! So his age remained a puzzle.

Cousin Lymon finished his painting at five-thirty o'clock in the afternoon. The day had turned colder and there was a wet taste in the air. The wind came up from the pinewoods, rattling windows,

blowing an old newspaper down the road until at last it caught upon a thorn tree.

People began to come in from the country; packed automobiles that bristled with the poked-out heads of children, waggons drawn by old mules which seemed to smile in a weary, sour way and plodded along with their tired eyes half-closed. Three young boys came from Society. City. All three of them wore yellow rayon shirts and caps put on backward—they were as much alike as triplets, and could always be seen at cock-fights and camp meetings. At six o'clock the mill-whistle sounded the end of the day's shift and the crowd was complete. Naturally, among the newcomers there were some riff-raff, unknown characters, and so forth—but even so the gathering was quiet.

A hush was on the town and the faces of people were strange in the fading light. Darkness hovered softly; for a moment the sky was a pale clear yellow against which the gables of the church stood out in dark and bare outline, then the sky died slowly and the darkness gathered into night.

Seven is a popular number, and especially it was a favourite with Miss Amelia. Seven swallows of water for hiccups, seven runs around the mill-pond for cricks in the neck, seven doses of Amelia Miracle Mover as a worm cure—her treatment nearly always hinged on this number. It is a number of mingled possibilities, and all who love mystery and charms set store by it. So the fight was to take place at seven o'clock.

This was known to everyone, not by announcement or words, but understood in the unquestioning way that rain is understood, or an evil odour from the swamp. So before seven o'clock everyone gathered gravely around the property of Miss Amelia. The cleverest got into the café itself and stood lining the walls of the room. Others crowded on to the front porch, or took a stand in the yard.

Miss Amelia and Marvin Macy had not yet shown themselves. Miss Amelia, after resting all the afternoon on the office bench, had gone upstairs. On the other hand Cousin Lymon was at your elbow every minute, threading his way through the crowd, snapping his fingers nervously, and batting his eyes. At one minute to seven o'clock he squirmed his way into the café and climbed up on the counter. All was very quiet.

It must have been arranged in some manner beforehand. For just at the stroke of seven Miss Amelia showed herself at the head of the stairs. At the same instant Marvin Macy appeared in front of the café and the crowd made way for him silently. They walked towards each other with no haste, their fists already gripped, and their eyes like the eyes of dreamers.

Miss Amelia had changed her red dress for her old overalls, and they were rolled up to the knees. She was barefooted and she had an iron strength-band around her right wrist. Marvin Macy had also rolled his trouser legs—he was naked to the waist and heavily greased; he wore the heavy shoes that had been issued him when he left the penitentiary.

Stumpy MacPhail stepped forward from the crowd and slapped their hip pockets with the palm of his right hand to make sure there would be no sudden knives. Then they were alone in the cleared centre of the bright café.

There was no signal, but they both struck out simultaneously. Both blows landed on the chin, so that the heads of Miss Amelia and Marvin Macy bobbed back and they were left a little groggy.

For a few seconds after the first blows they merely shuffled their feet around on the bare floor, experimenting with various positions, and making mock fists. Then, like wildcats, they were suddenly on each other.

There was the sound of knocks, panting, and thumpings on the floor. They were so fast that it was hard to take in what was going on—but once Miss Amelia was hurled backward so that she staggered and almost fell, and another time Marvin Macy caught a knock on the shoulder that spun him round like a top.

So the fight went on in this wild violent way with no sign of weakening on either side.

During a struggle like this, when the enemies are as quick and strong as these two it is worth while to turn from the confusion of the fight itself and observe the spectators. The people had flattened back as close as possible against the walls. Stumpy MacPhail was in a corner, crouched over and with his fists tight in sympathy, making strange noises. Poor Merlie Ryan had his mouth so wide open that a fly buzzed into it, and was swallowed before Merlie realized what had happened.

And Cousin Lymon—he was worth watching. The hunchback still stood on the counter, so that he was raised up above everyone else in the café. He had his hands on his hips, his big head thrust forward, and his little legs bent so that the knees jutted outward. The excitement had made him break out in a rash, and his pale mouth shivered.

Perhaps it was half an hour before the course of the fight shifted. Hundreds of blows had been exchanged, and there was still a deadlock. Then suddenly Marvin Macy managed to catch hold of Miss Amelia's left arm and pinion it behind her back. She struggled and got a grasp around his waist; the real fight was now begun.

Wrestling is the natural way of fighting in this county—as boxing is too quick and requires much thinking and concentration. And now that Miss Amelia and Marvin were locked in a hold together the crowd came out of its daze and pressed in closer.

For a while the fighters grappled muscle to muscle, their hipbones braced against each other. Backward and forward, from side to side, they swayed in this way. Marvin Macy still had not sweated, but Miss Amelia's overalls were drenched and so much sweat had trickled down her legs that she left wet footprints on the floor.

Now the test had come, and in these moments of terrible effort, it was Miss Amelia who was the stronger. Marvin Macy was greased and slippery, tricky to grasp, but she was stronger. Gradually she

bent him over backward, and inch by inch she forced him to the floor.

It was a terrible thing to watch and their deep hoarse breaths were the only sound in the café. At last she had him down, and straddled ; her strong big hands were on his throat.

But at that instant, just as the fight was won, a cry sounded in the café that caused a shrill bright shiver to run down the spine. And what took place has been a mystery ever since.

The whole town was there to testify what happened, but there were those who doubted their own eyesight. For the counter on which Cousin Lymon stood was at least twelve feet from the fighters in the centre of the café. Yet at the instant Miss Amelia grasped the throat of Marvin Macy the hunchback sprang forward and sailed through the air as though he had grown hawk wings. He landed on the broad strong back of Miss Amelia and clutched at her neck with his clawed little fingers.

The rest is confusion. Miss Amelia was beaten before the crowd could come to their senses. Because of the hunchback the fight was won by Marvin Macy, and at the end Miss Amelia lay sprawled on the floor, her arms flung outward and motionless.

Marvin Macy stood over her, his face somewhat pop-eyed, but smiling his old half-mouthed smile. And the hunchback, he had suddenly disappeared. Perhaps he was frightened about what he had done, or maybe he was so delighted that he wanted to glory with himself alone—at any rate he slipped out of the café and crawled under the back steps.

Someone poured water on Miss Amelia, and after a time she got up slowly and dragged herself into her office. Through the open door the crowd could see her sitting at her desk, her head in the crook of her arm, and she was sobbing with the last of her grating, winded breath.

Once she gathered her right fist together and knocked it three times on the top of her office desk, then her hand opened feebly and lay palm upward and still. Stumpy MacPhail stepped forward and closed the door.

The crowd was quiet, and one by one the people left the café. Mules were waked up and untied, automobiles cranked, and the three boys from Society City roamed off down the road on foot. This was not a fight to hash over and talk about afterwards ; people went home and pulled the covers up over their heads. The town was dark, except for the premises of Miss Amelia, but every room was lighted there the whole night long.

Marvin Macy and the hunchback must have left the town an hour or so before daylight. And before they went away this is what they did :

They unlocked the private cabinet of curios and took everything in it.

They broke the mechanical piano.

They carved terrible words on the café tables.

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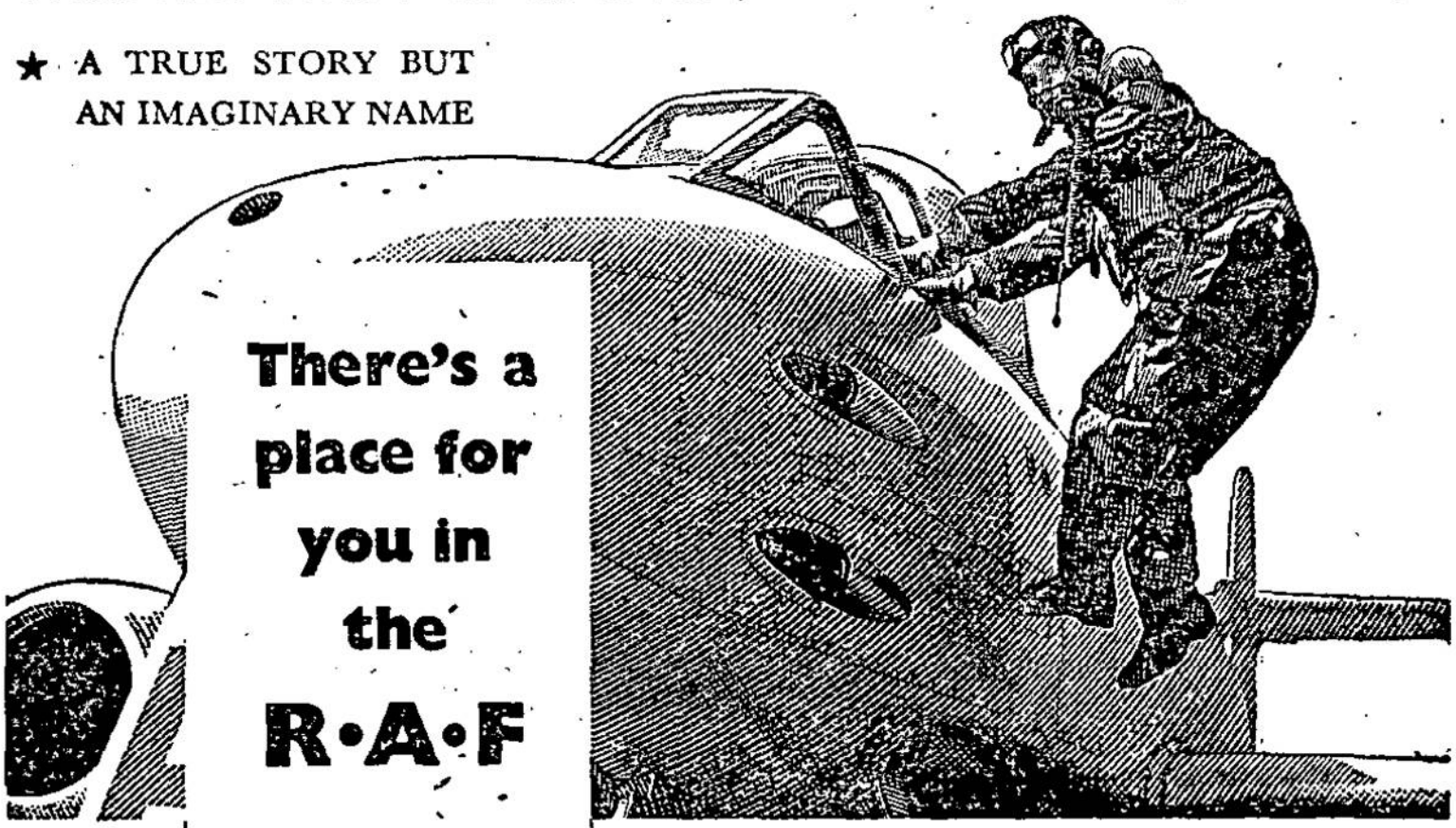

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They found the watch that opened in the back to show a picture of a waterfall and took that also.

They poured a gallon of sorghum syrup all over the kitchen floor and smashed the jars of preserves.

They went out in the swamp and completely wrecked the still, ruining the big new condenser and the cooler, and setting fire to the shack itself.

They fixed a dish of Miss Amelia's favourite food, grits with sausage, seasoned it with enough poison to kill off the county, and placed this dish temptingly on the café counter.

They did everything ruinous they could think of without actually breaking into the office where Miss Amelia stayed the night. Then they went off together, the two of them.

That was how Miss Amelia was left alone in the town. The people would have helped her if they had known how, as people in this town will as often as not be kindly if they have a chance. Several housewives nosed around with brooms and offered to clear up the wreck. But Miss Amelia only looked at them with lost crossed eyes and shook her head.

Stumpy MacPhail came in on the third day to buy a plug of Queenie tobacco, and Miss Amelia said the price was one dollar. Everything in the café had suddenly risen in price to be worth one dollar. And what sort of a café is that? Also, she changed very queerly as a doctor.

In all the years before she had been much more popular than the Cheehaw doctor. She had never monkeyed with a patient's soul, taking away from him such real necessities as liquor, tobacco, and so forth.

Once in a great while she might carefully warn a patient never to eat fried water-melon or some such dish that it had never occurred to a person to want in the first place. Now all this wise doctoring was over. She told one-half of her patients outright that they were going to die, and to the remaining half she recommended cures so far-fetched and agonizing that no one in his right mind would consider them for a moment.

Miss Amelia let her hair grow ragged, and it was turning grey. Her face lengthened, and the great muscles of her body shrank until she was thin as old maids are thin when they go crazy. And those grey eyes—slowly: day by day they were more crossed, and it was as though they sought each other out to exchange a little glance of grief and lonely recognition. She was not pleasant to listen to; her tongue had sharpened terribly.

When anyone mentioned the hunchback she would say only this: "Ho! If I could lay hand to him I would rip out his gizzard and throw it to the cat!"

But it was not so much the words that were terrible, but the voice in which they were said. Her voice had lost its old vigour; there was none of the ring of vengeance it used to have when she would mention "that loom-fixer I was married to," or some other enemy. Her voice

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was broken, soft, and sad as the wheezy whine of the church pump-organ.

For three years she sat out on the front steps every night, alone and silent, looking down the road and waiting. But the hunchback never returned.

There were rumours that Marvin Macy used him to climb into windows and steal, and other rumours that Marvin Macy had sold him into a side-show. But both these reports were traced back to Merlie Ryan. Nothing true was ever heard of him.

It was in the fourth year that Miss Amelia hired a Cheehaw carpenter and had him board up the premises, and there in those closed rooms she has remained ever since.

Yes, the town is dreary. On August afternoons the road is empty, white with dust, and the sky above is bright as glass. Nothing moves—there are no children's voices, only the hum of the mill. The peach trees seem to grow more crooked every summer, and the leaves are dull grey and of a sickly delicacy. The house of Miss Amelia leans so much to the right that it is now only a question of time and it will collapse completely, so that people are careful not to walk around the yard.

There is no good liquor to be bought in the town; the nearest still is eight miles away, and the liquor is such that those who drink it grow warts on their livers the size of goobers, and dream themselves

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ICS

into a dangerous inward world.

There is absolutely nothing to do in the town. Walk around the mill-pond, stand kicking at a rotten stump, figure out what you can do with the old waggon-wheel by the side of the road near the church. The soul rots with boredom.

You might as well go down to the Forks Falls highway and listen to the chain gang.

The Twelve Mortal Men

The Forks Falls highway is three miles from the town, and it is here the chain gang has been working. The road is of macadam, and the county decided to patch up the rough places and widen it at a certain dangerous place.

The gang is made up of twelve men, all wearing black and white striped prison suits, and chained at the ankles. There is a guard, with a gun, his eyes drawn to red slits by the glare.

The gang works all the day long, arriving huddled in the prison cart soon after day-break, and being driven off again in the grey August twilight. All day there is the sound of the picks striking into the clay earth, hard sunlight, the smell of sweat. And every day there is music.

One dark voice will start a phrase, half-sung, and like a question. And after a moment another voice will join in, soon the whole gang will be singing. The voices are dark in the golden glare, the music intricately blended, both sombre and joyful. The music will swell until at last it seems that the sound does not come from the twelve

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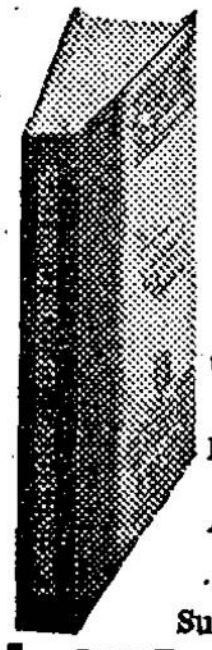

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BRITISH INSTITUTE OF ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

men on the gang, but from the earth itself, or the wide sky. It is music that causes the heart to broaden and the listener to grow cold with ecstasy and fright.

Then slowly the music will sink down until at last there remains one lonely voice, then a great hoarse breath, the sun, the sound of the picks in the silence.

And what kind of gang is this that can make such music? Just twelve mortal men, seven of them black and five of them white boys from this county. Just twelve mortal men who are together.

★ ***In the castle where Time lay frozen lived the wicked Duke and the Princess whose voice was faraway music. And then came the minstrel . . .***

You will be enchanted by this fairy tale with a difference, THE THIRTEEN CLOCKS, by James Thurber, and other brilliant stories for your Christmas entertainment in next month's ARGOSY, on sale December 10th.

ANSWERS to AFTERGLOW on page 37

1. *" A Farewell to Arms," by Ernest Hemingway.*
2. *" The Dog that Bit People," by James Thurber.*
3. *" Hero and Leander," by Christopher Marlowe.*
4. *" The Cruel Sea," by Nicholas Monsarrat.*
5. *" Anna Christie," by Eugene O'Neill.*
6. *" The Hollow Men," by T. S. Eliot.*
7. *" Kim," by Rudyard Kipling.*
8. *" O Mistress Mine ! " by William Shakespeare.*

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across.—1, Solely. 4, Stupidly. 9, Laid up. 10, Linesman. 12, Tweed. 13, Offensive. 15, Ram. 16, Crete. 17, Bucket. 22, Aspect. 24, Theme. 27, The. 28, Occipital. 31, Mould. 32, American. 33, Polish. 34, Cathleen. 35, Result.

Down.—1, Solstice. 2, Loitered. 3, Laundress. 5, Thief. 6, Pæan. 7, Domain. 8, Yonder. 11, Sombre. 14, Elk. 18, Cuttle. 19, Extempore. 20, Beaulieu. 21, Dead shot. 23, Phi. 25, Mosaic. 26, Accent. 29, Phial. 30, Trace.

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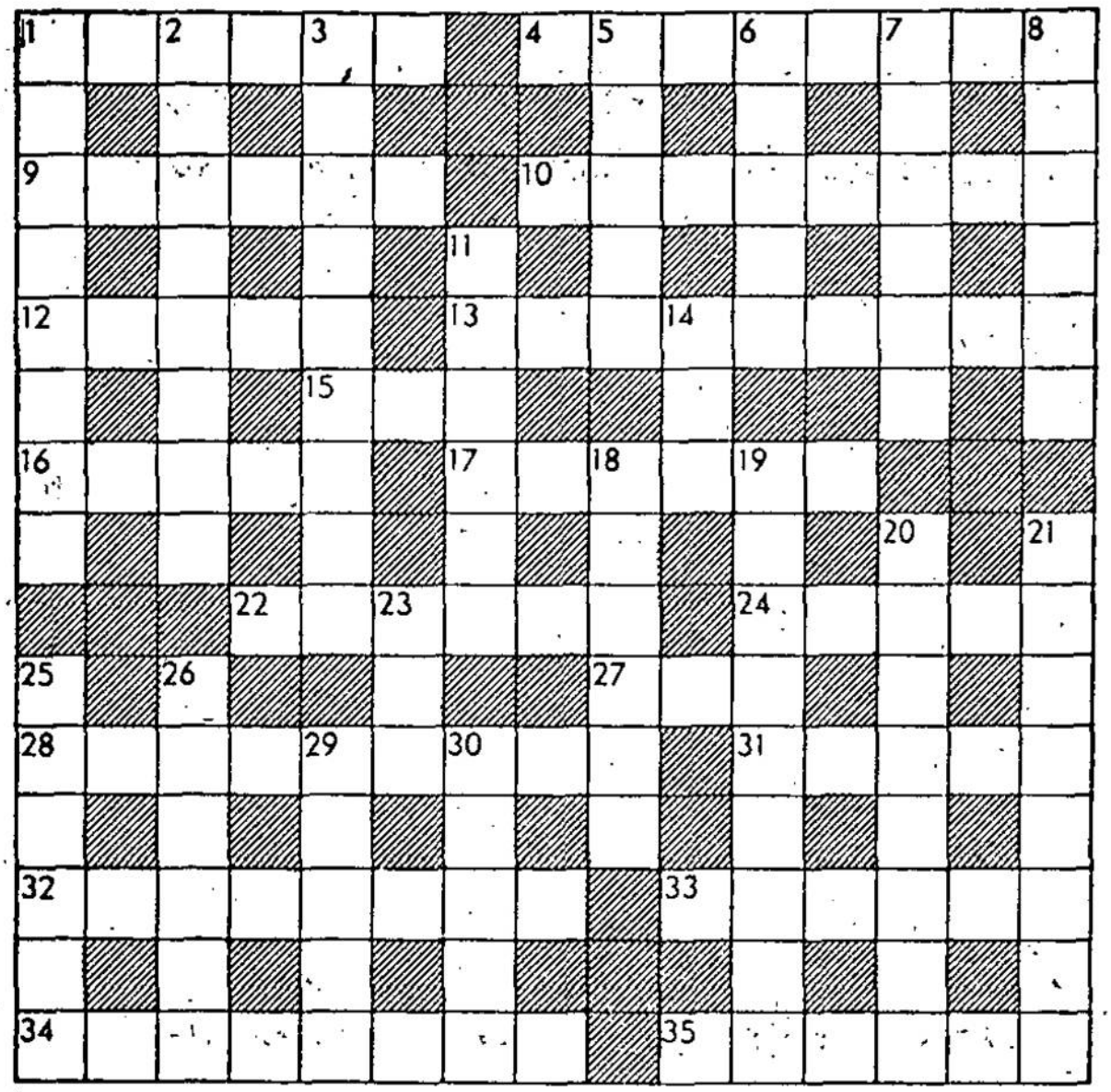
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 142



CLUES

Across

1 In this way Sir Peter painted, quite exclusively (6).

4 Puts back lazily, with no sign of intelligence (8).

9 Even if you dial backwards first it's still out of commission (4, 2).

10 It's his job to see that nothing goes off the rails (8).

12 Harris has a material connexion with this river (5).

13 A pretty nasty way to begin an attack (9).

15 Unshackled, this animal is the only survivor from broken-down surroundings (3).

16 No, this is *not* where cretins come from! (5).

17 If you kick this you're finished (6).

22 The appearance of light through a prism when all the rum has gone (6).

24 An important subject extracted from methane (5).

27 Leave me out of twenty-four (3).

28 Pit surrounded by disarranged calico at the back of the head (9).

31 When the rot sets in it may take this form (5).

32 This is a novel tragedy (8).

33 Was it too much of this on this corridor which made it such a slippery place in 1939? (6).

34 Yeats' legendary Countess (8).

35 The effect of lustre (6).

Down

1 Winter or summer, it ends on a chilly note (8).

2 Deer toil, though they were pretty slow about it (8).

3 Professionally she's rather starchy, but she may find a use for soft soap! (9).

5 "Every true man's apparel fits your ——" (Shakespeare) (5).

6 An ape makes a triumphant song (5).

7 This sounds a good area for matricide (6).

8 "And —— all before us lie Deserts of vast eternity (Andrew Marvell) (6).

11 Dismal; like the first part of a Mexican hat (6).

14 How strange to find a deer inside a steel kennel! (3).

18 A fine fish was Dickens' Captain (6).

19 Rex gets involved with a metope—all on the spur of the moment! (9).

20 Literally a lovely place—though not in France (8).

21 This marksman would find himself a target if he couldn't keep himself in order (4, 4).

23 The beginning of philosophy (3).

25 Set of laws regulating pavement design? (6).

26 A poor one is a give-away abroad (6).

29 All this contains is a drug on the market (5).

30 No sign of the harness! (5).

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